

# The New Amberola GRAPHIC

Spring  
Issue

→ See  
Dated  
Auctions in /  
This Issue!

Deadline for  
Next Issue:  
July 1st

April, 1992

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April, 1992  
(Spring)

# The New Amberola Graphic

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## Revised Notice

Advertisers who wish to prepare dated auction lists, etc., should keep in mind that delivery of the GRAPHIC sometimes takes upwards of three weeks to reach some parts of the country and Canada. We advise closing dates of no sooner than May 31, August 31, November 30 and February 28 for dated matter.

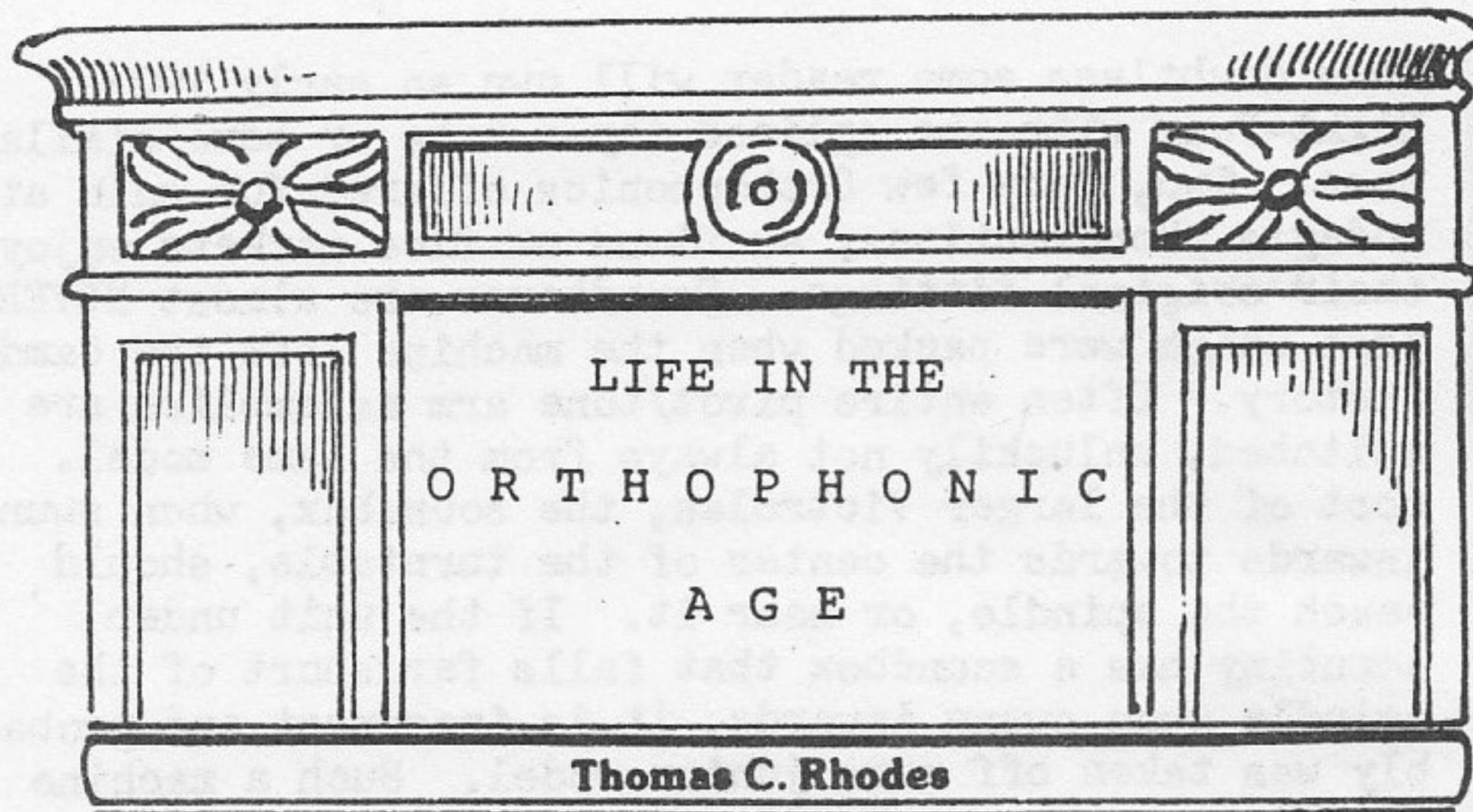
## Editor's Notes

Not long ago we predicted the imminent demise of the 45 rpm record. An article from Ron Dethlefson indicates that Sony has shut down its Carrollton, Georgia pressing plant. However, we were premature in the prediction, as 45s are still being manufactured, albeit in ever decreasing numbers. Columbia, Capitol, Arista, Reprise, and several smaller labels are still offering vinyl singles — mainly for those jukeboxes still playing them. Most dealers are unable or unwilling to obtain them for their customers.

We amend the prediction to say that the day will come when 45s manufactured after 1991 will be as collectible as many obscure labels of the late 1920s.

No sarcastic remarks about the state of the American auto industry this time! No blistering attack on the post office...not even a commentary on the inflated prices being asked at the shows, in spite of an economy in recession. Just my best wishes for spring, accompanied by this somewhat larger than usual issue.

- M.F.B.



## ABOUT TONE AND TONE ARMS

### Part I

#### "Speaking Plainly about Victor Tone Arms"

It has been the experience of this columnist that while some collectors of Orthophonics or other talking machines DO concern themselves with achieving some repair of the workings, chiefly the motive mechanicals, few become students of that most needed art of acoustics. While it is indeed gratifying to learn from the earnest outpourings of my many fine readers that increasing attention is being paid to soundbox restoration and tone chamber sealing, one matter still remains. Between the vivified soundbox and airtight chamber lies a neglected connector -- the tone arm.

In the early stages of the outside horn Victor, the soundbox was coupled directly to the horn. This allowed the almost immediate expansion of the needle arm impulses into soundwaves, giving forth that bright, forward sound so characteristic of those earliest talking machines. Given rather small horns this practice worked fairly well. Yet it was known even then that only bigger horns could bring forth better sound. Eldridge Johnson, no mere businessman, quickly thought of balancing the desired big horn in a fulcrum set-up, saving the soundbox and disk from too great a weight in tracking the record groove. But this solution had its limits, and with the public yearning for larger and better horns, it soon became clear that a better way had to be found. A straight hollow tube seemed to be the answer. This allowed the soundbox to be coupled to a conducting tube and the horn to be attached to a stout mounting. The joint not only gave the conducting tube proper tracking without huge mass and inertia, but gave the promise of still larger horns, since horn mass was no longer a drag on proper tracking. Yet all was not perfect. This same tube had a host of problems all its own.



Early straight tube  
(known as the "rigid" tone arm)

A few critical home listeners, as well as some Victor engineers, did notice a certain lessening of sound quality. While chiefly due to a lack of proper expansion in the conducting tube, the joining of the tube with the horn support and horn was hardly faultless either. A severe angle greeted the sound impulses not once but twice, causing a kind of hollow sound. Again, Eldridge Johnson came to the rescue with his superb remedy of making the tone arm all of a uniform expansion, with a greatly improved soundpath. This "taper tube" design not only fostered the correct and even expansion of the soundwaves but got rid of those sharp angles in the soundpath, helping the overall sound quite noticeably. (An alleged charge that someone other than Johnson invented the tapered tone arm, having no real documentary foundation, need not be dealt with in this article.) Thus Mr. Johnson's highly clever innovation made the tone arm the beginning of the horn. As such, it now deserves the same attention to sealing and function as the soundbox and wooden tone chamber.

Upon the advent of the Orthophonic Victrola in late 1925, the sole remaining weakness in the tone tube lay in the crook arm. While it did not block soundwaves nor let them escape (due to an ingenious slot valve), it did offer one last rather abrupt corner to slightly hamper the soundwaves. It was this minor flaw that was righted by the inventiveness of Mr. Henry Harrison, who designed a tone arm that only preserved the correct curves of exponential amplification but that was rid once and for all of all sharp bends that could hamper the sound. This is shown below.

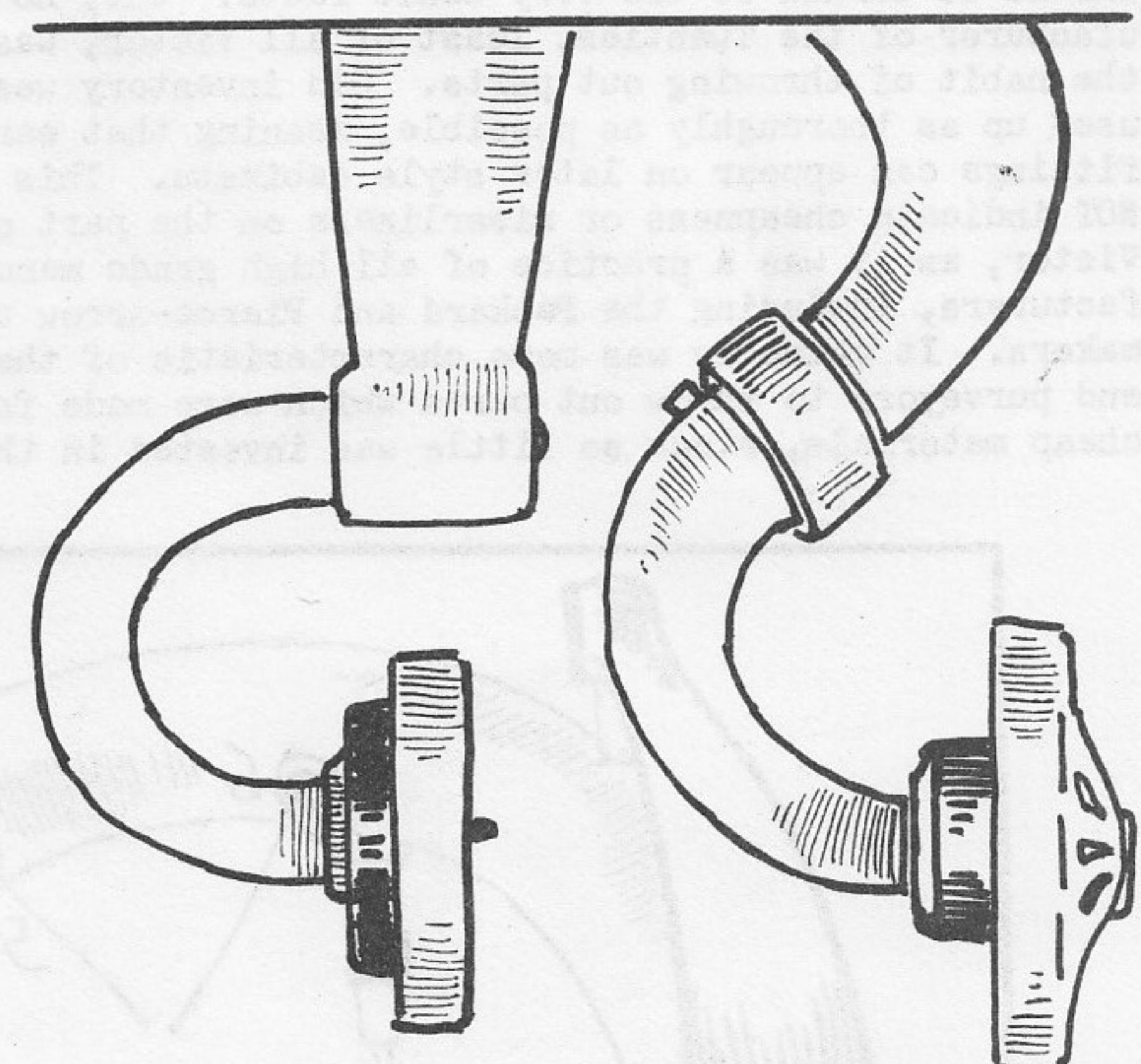


Figure No. 1

Comparison of old style crook arm with constant diameter and sharp angle versus Orthophonic crook of uniform expansion and smoothly curved sound passage.

Given this perfected design, how best to insure its peak performance? There are a few requisites which shall be listed. These will include ideas on fixing the pivot, since most Orthophonics are so equipped.

4.

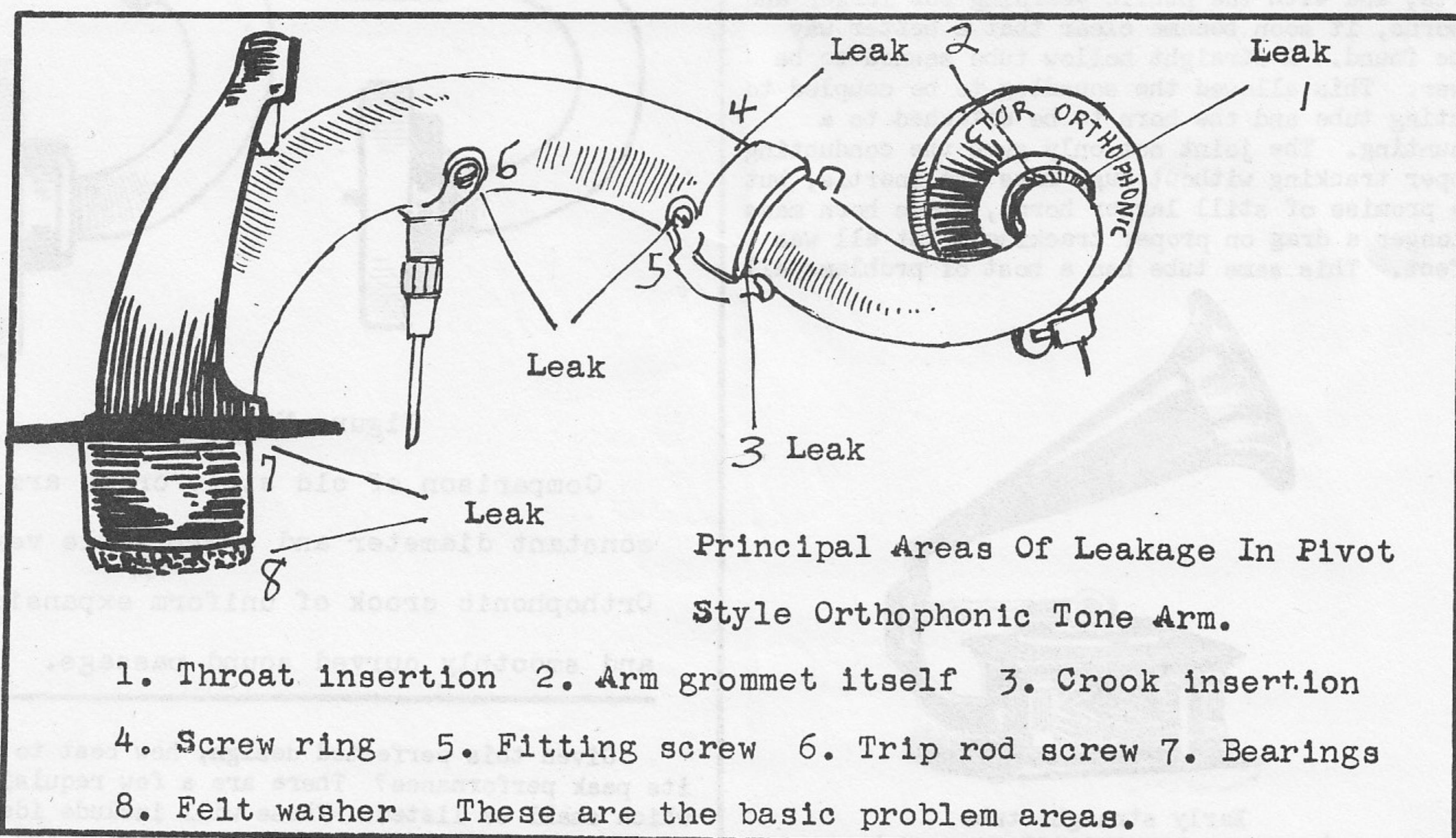
- A. The tone arm must be made as well sealed from any type of leakage as any part from the soundbox diaphragm on through...
- B. Yet it must allow sufficient freedom of movement to insure proper needle tracking on the groove while...
- C. Not allowing any untrue movement that could impede tracking or introduce resonance or false signal into the reproduction.

As the reader can see, the above requirements demand no small attention to thorough tone arm restoration. The illustration below sets forth the chief areas of possible leakage. Please note well: The Orthophonic tone arms went through a period of development comparable to the soundboxes, only in a shorter length of time. The earliest examples, commonly found only on very early production (September 1925 - February 1926) were held in place not by a pivot but by stout bearings underneath. This system had the advantage of simplicity but the drawbacks of greater mass and drag as the soundbox tracked the record. If the bearing channel developed any small dent, the effect on tracking was most nasty. Ditto with dried out grease and dirt in the bearing assembly. Although long bewailed as the chief ill of the Orthophonic Victrola, the later pot-metal pivot is the better design. Another feature of the early tone arms was that the taper tube was not "drawn out in one piece" but actually spliced. These are the so-called 'ringed' taper tubes, from the raised ring around the tube at the point of joining. Again, this is limited to very early production. By the middle of 1926 the one piece taper tube was perfected and used from then on. The collector should be warned of two very basic facts. One, no manufacturer of the Twenties, least of all Victor, was in the habit of throwing out parts. Old inventory was used up as thoroughly as possible, meaning that earlier fittings can appear on later style cabinets. This DOES NOT indicate cheapness or miserliness on the part of Victor, as it was a practice of all high grade manufacturers, including the Packard and Pierce-Arrow car makers. It actually was more characteristic of the low end purveyors to throw out parts which were made from cheap materials, since so little was invested in them.

Thus doubtless some reader will own an early 1927 Eight-Four with the spliced taper tube or some similar case. Two, very few Orthophonics offered for sale at today's phonoventions, auctions or flea markets enjoy their original fittings. Soundboxes are almost NEVER that which were packed when the machine left the Camden factory. Often entire pivot/tone arm assemblies are switched, unluckily not always from the same model. On most of the larger Victrolas, the soundbox, when swung inwards towards the center of the turntable, should reach the spindle, or near it. If the unit under scrutiny has a soundbox that falls far short of the spindle when swung inwards, it is incorrect and probably was taken off some junior model. Such a machine should never be purchased unless the buyer can furnish the correct arm. A tone arm too short can cause horrendous mistracking, due to its very bad arc over the record. A mint copy of your favorite Whiteman Concert disk would be turned into sonic garbage after just a few plays. This is no exaggeration! Poor sound due to groove damage will be most unpleasant when amplified by a six foot horn.

From soundbox to base, here are some things to mull over. Much is just common sense, with acoustic considerations primary:

1. The soundbox must fit over the end of the crook arm without chafing or binding but MUST NOT BE LOOSE. A loose fit not only leaks all the initial force of the diaphragm's pumping, but actually robs from this force by allowing the headshell to wobble, rather than the diaphragm to plunge. A loose soundbox kills volume, dynamics and bass like nothing else. Of course one should not attempt to put on the crook arm a soundbox with a cracked throat or arm grommet crumbling into mummified little bits, either.
2. The crook arm (sometimes shortened to "C" arm) must be so adjusted by its screw ring that it will allow only enough freedom for the arm and soundbox to follow any small changes in turntable or disk planarity. Other than this very modest rise and fall motion, no other movement other than lifting it backwards to rest can be permitted. In addition to robbing plunger action imparted by the modulating needle arm, a loose



crook arm will add unpleasant resonances to loud passages of the record.

3. All tiny screws and fittings on the taper tube must be present and screwed tight if they are mountings. This obviously includes stop screws and rest brackets and the brake trip rod attachments.
4. If the tone arm is of the early design, the main bearing must be undamaged to allow a smooth, nearly effortless but not loose, swing over the record surface. If of the later pivot type, it obviously must be undamaged and allow the above. If this pivot (or bracket) is broken, badly cracked or crumbling, it must be replaced. A wobbly pivot top and loose centering pin are useless for proper tracking and reproduction. Only the careless would ruin their records by playing or rather mistreating them on such an unstable machine. If your pivot has only very small cracks or chips that do not interfere with its soundness, then there is no need for a new one. Please resist the temptation to home-fix a crumbly, warped pivot that does not hold the taper tube in a secure arc. While this column cannot and will not endorse any particular supplier, cast pivots available from Norm and Janyne Smith of Wonderful Windup Antiques (9096 Harvard Blvd., Poland, OH 44514) are excellent, authentic and reasonably priced, considering the high quality of the casting. Other suppliers may be equally as good. When thinking about replacing the pivot, it would do well to recall that most old car enthusiasts would not stick rusty, dented headlights on their Model A roadster saying, "Well, that's good enough." If it IS broken, it DOES need fixing!



ORTHOPHONIC VICTROLA No. 4-40  
List price, Spring Motor, \$165.00

A specific listing of all the needed Steps and Hints will be given in the follow-up to this introduction. While some may scoff at these points as baseless and nitpicking, true Orthophiles will not. They alone know that any effort no matter how seemingly small is wholly justified in the quest for the finest performance. In the words of a distinguished executive of the Pierce-Arrow motorcar company: "Trifles make perfection but perfection is no trifle." We modern-day collectors should strive to be equally intolerant of sloppiness, bungling and incorrectness regarding our prized Orthophonic Victrolas. This is not best embodied in mere prissiness over cosmetic refinements but in an earnest attitude to do right by the noble sonic heritage of which we are the present guardians.

\* \* \* \* \*

Mr. Rhodes can be reached by writing him at 26 Austin Avenue, Apt. #106, Greenville, RI 02828.

## FALSE BOTTOM?

"The Gramophone Handbook", by W. S. Rogers, was printed in 1931 by the Pitman Press in Bath, England, and was published as a guide toward obtaining maximum results from the acoustic English phonographs of the time. The author covers most aspects of general interest including designs of cabinets, internal horns, reproducers, and motors. Records and needle types were also covered in this pamphlet.

In the section on records, the author included an interesting quote from some materials he had received from an unnamed American company that manufactured semi-permanent needles:

"On putting a question to a firm of manufacturers of gramophone needles as to how many records a particular make of needle (semi-permanent) would play, their reply was: "It is as difficult to answer as how many shaves will a safety-razor blade yield"; and then added, "The needles are in themselves quite uniform, but the wear of any kind of needle is determined entirely by the kind, character, and quality of the ingredients that go to make the record."

The author of "The Gramophone Handbook" then continues:

This point, I fancy, has not been fully appreciated by users of gramophones. I have myself suspected it, hence my practice of never using a semi-permanent needle for greater duty than half that specified by the maker, which puts one on the safe side. I am indebted to the same source for some further notes that I quote in full, as they furnish facts and views that may be new to the reader.

All records the first two or three times they are played will wear any kind of needle five times more rapidly than after that same record has been played over several times, this being due to the fact that the suction created in the pull-away of the pressing matrice in stamping the record creates what we might term a thin bottom to the groove.

In other words, there is a sort of raised film composed of the record material. This, of course, is not a distinguishable condition, but none the less is easily proven by an examination of the black material that is gathered up by the needle point the first one or two times the record is played. This material disappears after a time and is no longer gathered up by the needle point, since the bottoms of the sound grooves have been "burnished," from which time on, the wear on those records or needles is less than it was at first. After a record has been played twenty to twenty-five times, the major wear on the record is in its lateral direction, as the tendency then is to straighten and flatten out the sharp lateral thrust, in much the same way as a stream flowing against the lateral thrust of its banks in its main stream tends to wear down these banks.

This is particularly the case with the new electrical recorded records, which in the sound groove describe far more sharp lateral thrusts of the sound groove than the records recorded by old methods, and on that account do not last as long as the old records in reproducing value.

The "Gramophone Handbook" goes on to say:

I was glad to have these notes, which are from an American source, not only for the light they throw on needle wear, but also because they explain the origin of the fluffy material that always clogs the needle when playing a new record for the first time, which has always puzzled me."

This "false bottom" which new records had may be interesting news to many present-day collectors; there are precious few new and unplayed 78 rpm records still around. Does this fluffy material account for a lot of the shellac debris often found in record grooves?

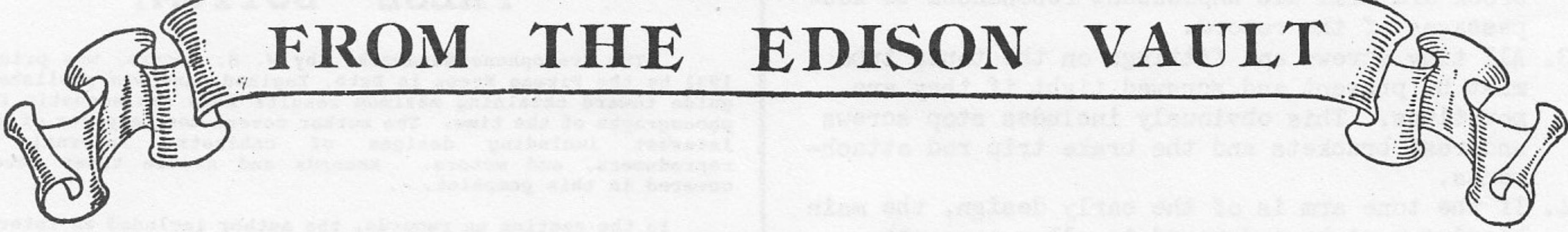
Mr. Rogers, in "The Gramophone Handbook", also makes the point that for home entertainment purposes there was no real need to play records on an all-electric phonograph. The Orthophonic-type acoustic phonographs of the day were more than adequate for playing the newest electrically recorded records at home. It is doubtful that the same sentiment prevailed in the United States where most people were more interested in the latest all-electric phonographs and radios. In England, interest in acoustic phonographs and sound reproduction methods remained high well into the 1940's.

R. J. Wakeman  
Davis, California

**A New Record must be played over at least three times with regular needles before it will give the best results**

("Proof Positive" from a 1923 Canadian Victor sleeve)

# FROM THE EDISON VAULT



EDISON PHONOGRAPH MONTHLY. (Jan. 1906) 5

Order Figures  
for the  
Two-Minute Grand Opera Recordings  
 by Ray Wile  
 (Annotations by Martin Bryan)

A few years ago I resumed my Edison research and set myself a research schedule in which I have made one monthly trip to West Orange on a continuing basis for the past few years. This has resulted in a continuous stream of electrostatic copies and much research that has not been brought to completion because of the hope that additional files will generate further information.

Because of the nature of archives, many items are filed at a date later than the contents would seem to indicate, and thus would be missed by one attempting to zero in on a particular topic or period. This was the case involving a whole series of printed forms that I located in a 1917 document file. The forms were designed for dealers to enter advance orders on for each release when offered. The importance of the file was that the forms were used to indicate the total number of advance orders that were placed for each selection beginning in 1906 and running (sometimes with large gaps in dating) into 1917.

I have extracted the 2-minute Grand Opera forms and include them for reproduction. The figures are complete except for the last American release and for the special New Zealand series of Pintucci. If there is interest we will run other portions in the future.

Remember that the figures represent jobber orders and that through exchange propositions records might be returned for credit towards newer selections. Thus, the figures may come close to the number that were ultimately distributed.. Considering wear and breakage, the Grand Opera cylinders are certainly not common records -- especially the later titles! Unfortunately the four-minute Grand Operas were issued during a period in which there are large gaps in the run of advance reports.

To begin with, we reproduce the announcements to the trade for the first three series of Grand Opera records. Sales figures for these 30 records will be found tabulated at the bottom of Supplement No. 5. These announcements come courtesy of Wendell Moore's reprints of the Edison Phonograph Monthly.

## GRAND OPERA RECORDS.

## Announcement to the Trade.

We have perfected plans for the issuance of a series of Edison Records of Grand Opera selections, made by the principal stars of the Metropolitan Opera House, New York, and prominent artists appearing in Grand Opera in this country and abroad. The following artists appear in the ten selections given herewith that comprise the first list of the series:

Antonio Scotti, Italian baritone	Florencio Constantino, Italian tenor
Heinrich Knote, German tenor	Romeo Berti, Italian tenor
Andreas Dippel, German tenor	Gustave Berl Resky, Italian baritone
Anton Van Rooy, German baritone	Signora Scarphy Resky, Italian soprano

The services of these great artists of the Grand Opera world, as will be understood, were obtained at an extraordinary expense. The work of recording was done at our own laboratories, where our unrivaled equipment made it possible to secure the most faithfully accurate and natural reproductions.

Other instalments of these Records will be issued from time to time.

As an evidence of the artistic character of these Records, we print below the translation of a letter written by Signor Scotti referring to the records made of his voice.

NATIONAL PHONOGRAPH CO., Orange, N. J.  
 New York Chicago London Paris Berlin  
 Brussels Sydney Mexico City

## LETTER FROM SIGNOR SCOTTI

MILAN, October 9, 1905.

"I have great pleasure in informing you that the cylinders which I sang for you are excellent from every point of view, and I consider them as an absolutely natural reproduction of my voice. I must, however, tell you that the cylinder on which I sang the air from the 'Sonambula' pleases me most, and I certainly think it is the best of all I have ever heard."

(Signed) A. SCOTTI."

## Grand Opera Records—Supplement A.

FEBRUARY, 1906.

By HEINRICH KNOTE, Tenor.	By SCARPHY RESKY, Soprano
B. 1—"HOCHSTES VERTRAUEN," ("All confidence thou ow'st me.") "Lohengrin" ..... Wagner <i>Sung in German. Orchestra accompaniment.</i>	B. 6—"ARIA, "SUICIDIO," "La Gioconda" ..... Ponchielli <i>Sung in Italian. Orchestra accompaniment.</i>
By ANDREAS DIPPEL, Tenor	By ROMEO BERTI, Tenor
B. 2—"ACH, SO FROMM," "Martha" ..... Flotow ("None so rare.") <i>Sung in German. Orchestra accompaniment.</i>	B. 7—"ARIOSO, "Pagliacci," ... Leoncavalla <i>Sung in Italian. Orchestra accompaniment.</i>
By GUSTAVE BERL RESKY, Baritone	By SIGNOR AND SIGNORA RESKY
B. 3—"DI PROVENZA IL MAR," "La Traviata" ..... Verdi ("Hath thy home in fair Provence.") <i>Sung in Italian. Orchestra accompaniment.</i>	B. 8—"DUET, "La Favorita" .... Donizetti <i>Sung in Italian. Orchestra accompaniment.</i>
By FLORENCO CONSTANTINO, Tenor	By ANTON VAN ROOY, Baritone
B. 4—"LA DONNA E MOBILE," "Rigoletto" ..... Verdi ("Fair woman is fickle.") <i>Sung in Italian. Orchestra accompaniment.</i>	B. 9—"O KEHR ZURUCK," "Tannhäuser" ..... Wagner <i>Sung in German. Orchestra accompaniment.</i>
By ANTONIO SCOTTI, Baritone	By ANTON VAN ROOY, Baritone
B. 5—"VI RAVVISO, O LUOGHI AMENI," ("Oh, remembrance of scenes long vanished.") "La Sonnambula" ..... Bellini <i>Sung in Italian. Orchestra accompaniment.</i>	B. 10—"CHANSON DU TOREADOR," ("Toreador's Song") "Carmen" ..... Bizet <i>Sung in French. Orchestra accompaniment.</i>

EDISON PHONOGRAPH MONTHLY. (Apr. 1906) 7

## GRAND OPERA RECORDS.—Supplement No. 2.

## Announcement to the Trade.

The second list of Edison Grand Opera Records will go out on May 1st, with the prestige of the greatest single success in the history of the Edison Phonograph. Until the first ten of these Records were fairly on the market it was uncertain how the trade and the public would receive them. In view of the money expended, the care taken to produce them, and their artistic excellence, we believed that they would be a success and we awaited the verdict of the public with great interest. The approval of the public was prompt and emphatic. It accorded them a most enthusiastic reception. Their success was far beyond the most sanguine expectations of all identified with the Edison interests. For clearness, naturalness and artistic reproduction they were pronounced superb. They were hailed as marking an epoch in the art of reproduced sound. No doubt remains that Edison Grand Opera Records will hereafter be one of the most attractive features of the Edison Phonograph, especially to those of refined musical taste.

As showing the extent of the demand for the Records we would state that orders in the first three months will reach a total five times as great as we anticipated when they were first issued. A better evidence of their popularity could not be wanted.

These new selections are sung by Messrs. Scotti, Knote, Dippel, van Rooy, Resky, Constantino and Berti, the first five of whom sang the principal roles at the Metropolitan Opera House, New York, last winter. Messrs. Constantino and Berti have not yet sung in this country, but they have won a name abroad as artists of unusual talent.

The selections are among the most charming airs in the great operas from which they are taken. They are rendered by the several artists just as they sing them in the operas and, while listening to them, one can almost see the singers holding the Metropolitan Opera House audiences spellbound with the magic of their wonderful voices.

NATIONAL PHONOGRAPH CO., Orange, N. J.

## GRAND OPERA SUPPLEMENT NO. 2.—May, 1906.

- B. 11—MATTINATA,  
"Il Barbiere di Siviglia"....Rossini  
By FLORENCIO CONSTANTINO, Tenor.  
Sung in Italian Orchestra accompaniment
- B. 12—CELESTE AIDA,  
"Aida" .... Verdi  
By FLORENCIO CONSTANTINO, Tenor.  
Sung in Italian Orchestra accompaniment
- B. 13—PREISLIED, "Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg"....Wagner  
By HEINRICH KNOTE, Tenor.  
Sung in German Orchestra accompaniment
- B. 14—DUETTO,  
"La Traviata" .... Verdi  
By SIGNOR AND SIGNORA RESKY  
Sung in Italian Orchestra accompaniment
- B. 15—ROMANZE,  
"Die Hugenotten" .... Meyerbeer  
By ANDREAS DIPPEN, Tenor  
Sung in German Orchestra accompaniment
- B. 16—PREGHIERA ..... Tosti  
By GUSTAVE BERL RESKY, Baritone  
Sung in Italian Orchestra accompaniment
- B. 17—SICILIANA,  
"Cavalleria Rusticana"....Mascagni  
By ROMEO BERTI, Tenor.  
Sung in Italian Orchestra accompaniment
- B. 18—QUESTA O QUELLA,  
"Rigoletto" ..... Verdi  
By ROMEO BERTI, Tenor  
Sung in Italian Orchestra accompaniment
- B. 19—O. DU MEIN HOLDER ABEND-  
STERN, "Tannhauser"....Wagner  
By ANTON VAN ROOY, Baritone  
Sung in German Orchestra accompaniment
- B. 20—PROLOGO,  
"Pagliacci" ..... Leoncavallo  
By ANTONIO SCOTTI, Baritone  
Sung in Italian Orchestra accompaniment

EDISON PHONOGRAPH MONTHLY. (June 1906) 7

## ADVANCE LIST OF GRAND OPERA RECORDS.

Supplement No. 3, August, 1906.

The ten Edison Grand Opera Records listed below will be shipped by freight from Orange with the regular August selections and, all things being favorable, they will reach all Jobbers in the United States and Canada before July 27th. Like the regular list, the Grand Opera Records must not be placed on sale by Jobbers or be re-shipped to Dealers before 8 A. M. on July 27th. Supplements, hangers, etc., will be shipped at the same time and these also must not be distributed in advance of Records.

Jobbers are required to mail orders to us on or before June 10th. Orders not so mailed will be considered as second orders and filled later.

Dealers should place orders for Grand Opera Records with their Jobbers before June 10th to insure prompt and complete shipment when Jobbers' stock is received.

The third list of Grand Opera Records presented herewith will be even more popular than the two lists previously issued. These selections comprise four in German, three in Italian, one in Latin, one in Spanish and one in French. Each is sung by a different artist and three are by women's voices.

The list introduces four new artists in Mme. Rappold, soprano; Miss Bessie Abott, soprano; Mme. Jacoby, contralto, and Alois Burgstaller, tenor. All of these artists sang leading roles at the Metropolitan Opera House last winter and are, therefore, singers of the first rank.

For artistic rendition, natural and smooth reproduction and musical qualities these ten selections will be a delight to all lovers of the music created by the great composers.

NATIONAL PHONOGRAPH Co., Orange, N. J.

New York, London, Paris, Berlin, Brussels, Sydney, Mexico City.

Edison Grand Opera Records, price 75 cents each in the United States; 85 cents each in Canada.

## SUPPLEMENT NO. 3, AUGUST, 1906.

- B. 21—AVE MARIA,.....Gounod  
By MME. RAPPOLD, Soprano.  
Sung in Latin Orchestra accompaniment
- B. 22—"FANGET AN." "Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg"....Wagner  
By HEINRICH KNOTE, Tenor.  
Sung in German Orchestra accompaniment
- B. 23—L'AIR DES BIJOUX,  
"Faust" ..... Gounod  
By MISS BESSIE ABOTT, Soprano.  
Sung in French Orchestra accompaniment
- B. 24—ERZAHUNG,  
"Königin von Saba"....Goldmark  
By ANDREAS DIPPEN, Tenor.  
Sung in German Orchestra accompaniment
- B. 25—ARIA ("Ein Band der Freundschaft") "Don Giovanni"....Mozart  
By ALOIS BURGSTALLER, Tenor.  
Sung in German Orchestra accompaniment
- B. 26—E LUCEVAN LE STELLE,  
"Tosca" ..... Puccini  
By ROMEO BERTI, Tenor.  
Sung in Italian Orchestra accompaniment
- B. 27—LOS OJOS NEGROS.....Alarcos  
By GUSTAVE BERL RESKY, Baritone.  
Sung in Spanish Orchestra accompaniment
- B. 28—ARIA DEL PAGGIO,  
"Gli Ugonotti" ..... Meyerbeer  
By MME. JACOBY, Contralto.  
Sung in Italian Orchestra accompaniment
- B. 29—ARIA, "Wie oft in Meeres  
tiefen Schlund"  
"Der Fliegende Holländer" Wagner  
By ANTON VAN ROOY, Baritone.  
Sung in German Orchestra accompaniment
- B. 30—"M'APPARI," "Marta" ..... Flotow  
By FLORENCIO CONSTANTINO, Tenor.  
Sung in Italian Orchestra accompaniment



The list price of these Grand Opera Records has been fixed at seventy-five (75) cents each and they must be sold under all the conditions of the present agreement governing the sale of Edison goods. The full list price of seventy-five (75) cents must be maintained. The Dealer's price will be forty-five (45) cents each net.

There was a 30¢ profit to the dealer for every Grand Opera record sold. (This compares to 14¢ profit for regular 2-minute records.)

Supplement No. 4. A total of 23,444 were ordered by dealers in advance of the month they were to be placed on sale.

## DEALER'S ORDER BLANK

FOR

## EDISON GRAND OPERA RECORDS

FILL OUT AND SEND TO YOUR JOBBER.

M Total sales for G O records series

Ship Grand Edison Opera Records with our November Records #4  
on October 27th as per list below

Via Closed October 10th 1906

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Address \_\_\_\_\_

## SUPPLEMENT No. 4

- 2261..B. 31—Arie, "Durch die Wälder," "Der Freischütz" Weber  
By ALOISE BURGSTALLER, Tenor, (German)
- 2460..B. 32—Sortita d'Amonasro, "Aida" Verdi  
ANTONIO SCOTTI, Baritone, (Italian)
- 2520..B. 33—Balkon Scene, "Euch Lüften," "Lohengrin" Wagner  
By MME. RAPPOLD, Soprano, (German)
- 2258 B. 34—Deserto Sulla Terra," "Il Trovatore" Verdi  
By ROMEO BERTI, Tenor, (Italian)
- 2215 B. 35—El mar sin playas Sancedo  
By GUSTAVE BERL RESKY, Baritone, (Spanish)
- 2258 B. 36—Lohengrin's Abschied, "Lohengrin" Wagner  
By ANDREAS DIPPEN, Tenor, (German)
- 2470..B. 37—L'aria di Gilda, "Caro Nome," "Rigoletto" Verdi  
By MISS BESSIE ABOTT, Soprano, (Italian)
- 2332 B. 38—Siegmund's Liebeslied, "Walküre" Wagner  
By HEINRICH KNOTE, Tenor, (German)
- 2312 B. 39—L'air de Stephano. "Romeo et Juliette" Gounod  
By MME. JACOBY, Contralto, (French)
- 2458 B. 40—Dei miei bollenti Spiriti, "La Traviata" Verdi  
23444 By FLORENCIO CONSTANTINO, Tenor, (Italian)

ORDERS FOR GRAND OPERA RECORDS  
SHOULD REFER TO NO OTHER GOODS

Form No. 935



GIUSEPPE CAMPANARI, BARITONE.



ROBERT BLASS, BASSO:

NEW ARTISTS IN GRAND OPERA SUPPLEMENT No. 5 JUST ISSUED.

Supplement No. 5. Much to notice here!

1. Number of issues was cut to five; there is a slight drop in the per-record advance orders.
2. Cumulative sales figures are shown for the first time. Note that Constantino's "La donna è mobile" had already exceeded 13,500! (#B 4)
3. Orders for numbers 31 through 40 continued to come in after the advance orders for the previous list. We have calculated that 5316 more records were ordered in the intervening three months. That's an average of about 532 more per title, or an increase of about 23%.

**DEALER'S ORDER BLANK**  
FOR  
**EDISON GRAND OPERA RECORDS**  
FILL OUT AND SEND TO YOUR JOBBER

M Sales to date 7807

On January 28, 1907, ship Edison Grand Opera Records  
(with our February Records) as per list below

Via \_\_\_\_\_  
Name \_\_\_\_\_ Address \_\_\_\_\_

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**SUPPLEMENT No. 5**

2107.B. 41—"Nobil dama," "Gli Ugonotti"	Meyerbeer
By MARIO ANCONA, Baritone, (Italian)	
2167.B. 42—"Guardate pazzo son 'io," "Manon Lescaut"	Puccini
By FLORENCO CONSTANTINO, Tenor, (Italian)	
2303.B. 43—Gebet, "Allmacht 'ge Jungfrau," "Tannhäuser"	Wagner
By MME RAPPOLD, Soprano, (German)	
2221.B. 44—"Bella siccome un angelo," "Don Pasquale"	Donizetti
By ANTONIO SCOTTI, Baritone, (Italian)	
2020.B. 45—"Willst jenes Tags," "Der Fliegende Holländer"	Wagner
By ALOIS BURGSTALLER, Tenor, (German)	

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Also previously issued Selections as follows:

7736...B. 1	6460..B. 11	6556..B. 21	2671..B. 31
8319...B. 2	6700..B. 12	3520..B. 22	2969..B. 32
7747...B. 3	5873..B. 13	4360..B. 23	3077..B. 33
13538...B. 4	5481..B. 14	3471..B. 24	2752..B. 34
9634...B. 5	5558..B. 15	3542..B. 25	2705..B. 35
7482...B. 6	5491..B. 16	4474..B. 26	2677..B. 36
8398...B. 7	6194..B. 17	3513..B. 27	3286..B. 37
8245...B. 8	6424..B. 18	3910..B. 28	2799..B. 38
7721...B. 9	6406..B. 19	3325..B. 29	2734..B. 39
9126...B. 10	6803..B. 20	4140..B. 30	3090..B. 40

ORDERS FOR GRAND OPERA RECORDS  
SHOULD REFER TO NO OTHER GOODS

Form No. 1008

**DEALER'S ORDER BLANK**  
FOR  
**EDISON GRAND OPERA RECORDS**  
FILL OUT AND SEND TO YOUR JOBBER

M Total sale May G. O. closed Apr. 15-07  
On April 27th, 1907, ship Edison Grand Opera Records  
(with our May Records) as per list below

Via \_\_\_\_\_  
Name \_\_\_\_\_ Address \_\_\_\_\_

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**SUPPLEMENT No. 6**

1964.B. 46—"Tarantella,"	Rossini
By GIUSEPPE CAMPANARI, Baritone, (Italian)	
2193.B. 47—"L'Air des Fleurs" de Siebel, "Faust,"	Gounod
By MME. JACOBY, Contralto, (French)	
1981.B. 48—"In diesen heil'gen Hallen," "Die Zauberflöte"	Mozart
By ROBERT BLASS, Basso, (German)	
2070.B. 49—"O Paradiso in terra," "L'Africaine"	Meyerbeer
By FLORENCO CONSTANTINO, Tenor, (Italian)	
1954.B. 50—"A tanto amor," "La Favorita,"	Donizetti
By MARIO ANCONA, Baritone, (Italian)	
<b>10162 Total</b>	

**DEALER'S ORDER BLANK**  
FOR  
**EDISON GRAND OPERA RECORDS**  
FILL OUT AND SEND TO YOUR JOBBER

M Total sales of August G.O. records closed 7/17

On July 27th, 1907, ship Edison Grand Opera Records  
(with our August Records) as per list below

Via \_\_\_\_\_  
Name \_\_\_\_\_ Address \_\_\_\_\_

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**SUPPLEMENT No. 7**

1586...B. 51—"Ich grolle nicht,"	Schumann
By OTTO GORITZ, Baritone, (German)	
1783...B. 52—Brindisi, "Cavalleria Rusticana,"	Mascagni
By FLORENCO CONSTANTINO, Tenor, (Italian)	
1615...B. 53—"In quelle trine morbide," "Manon Lescaut,"	Puccini
By SIGNORINA GARAVAGLIA, Soprano, (Italian)	
1631...B. 54—"Io son l'amore,"	Tosti
By GIUSEPPE CAMPANARI, Baritone, (Italian)	
1528...B. 100—"Cujus Animam," "Stabat Mater,"	Rossini
By ANGIOLO PINTUCCI, Tenor, (Latin)	
<b>8143</b>	

## Grand Opera for the Edison Phonograph

"Wilt thou recall  
that day"  
from  
"The Flying Dutchman"

Total Sales Nov. G.O. Records closed  
9/14/07.

- 1432- B-55 Steuermannslied - Knote (Tenor)  
1609- B-56 L'Ultima Rosa d'Estate - (Baritone)  
Bessie Abbott  
1444- B-57 Quand 'ero Paggio - Scotti (Baritone)  
1419- B-58 So Anch 'Io la Virtu Magic - (Locrian)  
Signorina Garavaglia  
1423- B-59 Alto La.- Constantino (Tenor)

Supplement No. 9. Grand Opera records are now listed with the regular domestic list. Notice that advance orders are about half of what they were on supplement No. 4 (about 16 months earlier).

DEALER'S ORDER BLANK			
FOR			
Edison Gold Moulded Records for March, 1908			
FILL OUT AND SEND TO YOUR JOBBER			
Total Sales of March Records Closed Feb. 15th, 1908.			
On February 24th ship MARCH RECORDS as per list below via			
Name _____	Address _____		
QUANTITY WANTED	RECORD NUMBER	TITLE OF SELECTION	
31910	9770	Cavalry Charge (Luders)	Edison Military Band
5	9771	When the Springtime Brings the Roses (Jessie Dear)	(Helf) Manuel Romain
33200	9772	Sahara (Williams and Van Alstyne)	Collins and Hart
6	9773	Her Bright Smile Haunts Me Still (Wrighton)	Edison Venetian Trio
27728	9774	Golden Sails (Robyn)	Florence Hinkle
31772	9775	Upper Ten and Lower Five (Thornton) (Character Duet)	Favor and Meeker
28395	9776	"Moolbarri" (McCree) (Italian dialect song)	James Brockman
4	9777	The Teddy Bears' Picnic (Bratton)	Edison Symphony Orchestra
29521	9778	When You Love Her and She Loves You (Mills)	Byron G. Harlan
32966	9779	Sheriff's Sale of a Stranded Circus (Original)	Spencer and Girard
3	9780	I'm Afraid to Come Home in the Dark (Williams and Van Alstyne)	Billy Murray
26819	9781	The Marriage of Figaro Overture (Mozart)	Edison Concert Band
28880	9782	The Heart You Lost in Maryland You'll Find in Tennessee (Solman)	Frederick Rose
34536	9783	To the Work (Doane) (Sacred)	Edison Mixed Quartette
29860	9784	Nothin' Ever Worries Me (Hirsch) (Coon Song)	Arthur Collins
35492	9785	"Smile, Smile, Smile" and "Kiss, Kiss, Kiss" (Hoffman) (Bells Solo)	Albert Benzler
27756	9786	Bygone Days (Ball) (Sentimental Song)	Harry Anthony
2	9787	Muggy's Dream (Original) (Street Scene)	Ada Jones and Len Spencer
31791	9788	I Marched Around Again (Rose and Snyder) (Comic Song)	Edward Meeker
34093	9789	The Merry Widow Selection (Löhner-Ecke)	Edison Symphony Orchestra
34505	9790	Flanagan's St. Patrick's Day (Original)	Steve Porter
33299	9791	The Sword of Bunker Hill (Covert-Ecke)	Edison Male Quartette
1	9792	She Forgot to Bring Him Back (May Irwin)	Ada Jones
39508	9793	Down the Field March (Friedman)	Edison Military Band
32641	788459	Grand Opera Selections	
1198	B. 60	Figli miei—"Sansone e Dalila" (Saint-Saëns) Tenor solo in Italian.	Arturo Franceschini
1200	B. 61	Nonconosci il bel suol—"Mignon" (Thomas) Signorina Giuseppina Giaconia Soprano solo in Italian.	
1201	B. 62	Rondo vom Goldenen Kalb—"Faust" (Gounod) Basso solo in German.	Robert Blass
1290	B. 63	Una furtiva lagrima—"L'Elixir d'Amore" (Donizetti) Tenor solo in Italian.	Florencio Constantino
1281	B. 64	Cancione del Torero—"Carmen" (Bizet) Baritone solo in Italian.	Giuseppe Campanari
6170	MARCH SUPPLEMENTS MARCH PHONOGRAMS AT 25c PER HUNDRED		
ORDERS FOR MARCH RECORDS SHOULD REFER TO NO OTHER GOODS			

### GRAND OPERA CUT-OUTS TWO-MINUTE

December 23, 1909

One of the lists discovered in my research was a list giving two-minute Grand Opera cut-outs (records removed from the catalogue). Dated December 23, 1909, it either segregated titles that had become slow sellers or whose working molds were no longer usable.

B2	B14	B21	B30	B50
B3	B15	B24	B31	B51
B6	B16	B25	B35	B54
B7	B17	B27	B36	B60
B8		B29	B41	B61
B9			B45	B66
				B68

### Conclusions

We can state confidently that at least a quarter of a million 2-minute Grand Opera record were distributed! What went wrong, and why are they so hard to find nowadays?

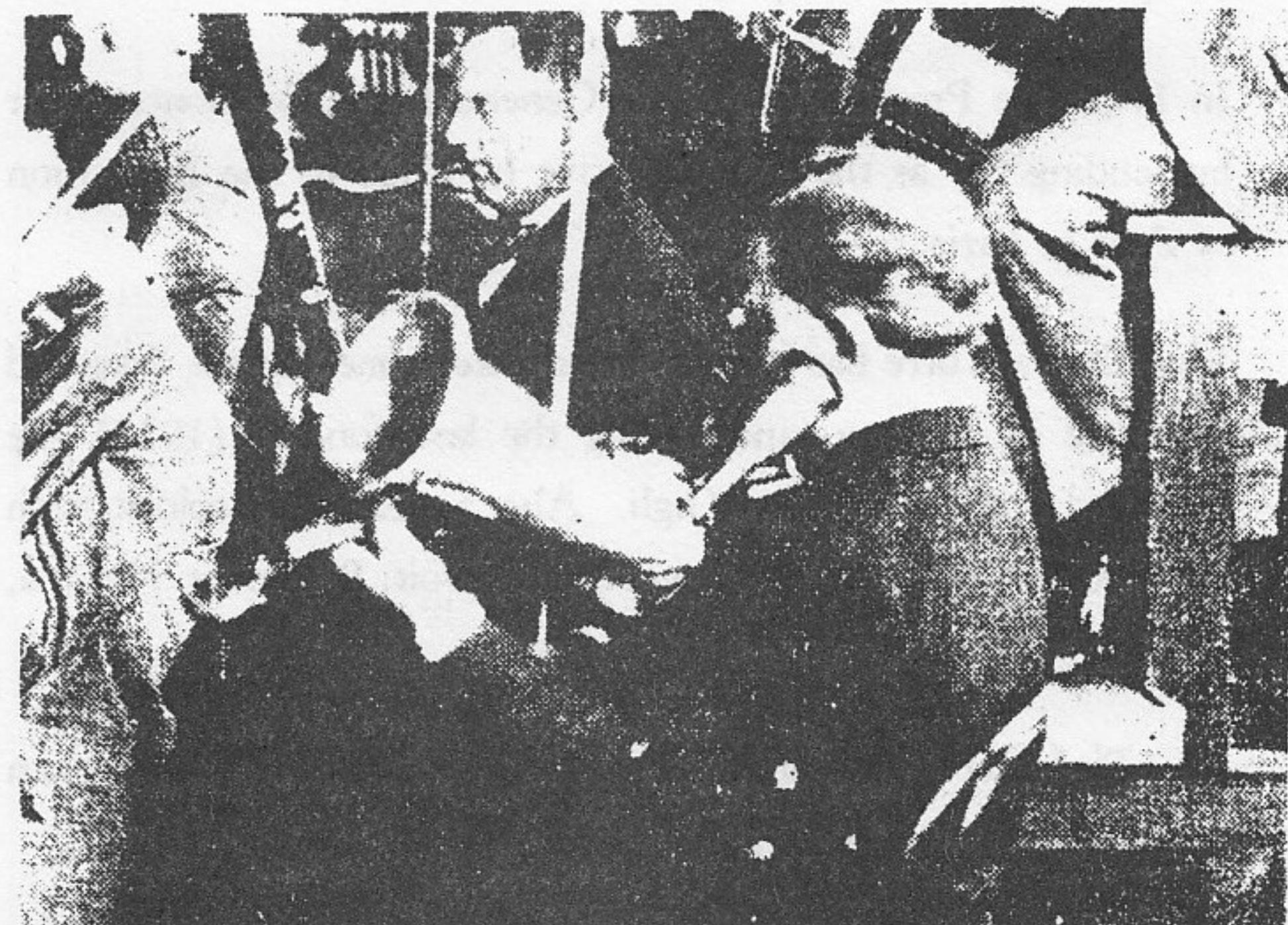
For one thing, it appears that they were a success initially. I wonder how many Victor Red Seal records from early 1906 (Grand Prize label) reached average sales of nearly 8800 in just over a year, as the first ten Edisons did. It was probably urban customers who bought the majority of these records, and by 1908 many opera lovers had undoubtedly converted to disc systems. After all, two minutes is hardly enough time for most operatic arias, and Victor's catalogue of 12" Red Seals was growing all the time.

And if urban dwellers did buy the majority of these records, this would explain why more of them haven't survived; many city folks live in apartments and have little room to store obsolete entertainment equipment. Thousands of Edison phonographs just got put out on the street for the rubbish man.

But we also have to put the Grand Opera output into some perspective. Even though some 250,000 or more were distributed, this was just a tiny fraction of the number of standard records being sold. Notice that the advance orders for March, 1908's popular records alone were nearly eight hundred thousand. And don't forget, this was advance orders. Popular numbers such as "The Teddy Bears' Picnic" or "I'm Afraid to Come Home in the Dark" were available for at least four more years. Their sales figures may ultimately have been double the advance orders. These two records alone could very well represent half of all the Grand Opera records that were sold!

Eighty-plus years later we tend to forget what an enormous impact the Edison phonograph of pre-1910 had. The plant was running 24 hours a day to satisfy the demand for records, and this doesn't even take Columbia and Indestructible's output into consideration. What has survived (especially in good condition) may not even represent 1% of the total production. Is it any wonder, then, that the Edison 2-minute Grand Opera records turn up so infrequently?

In George Paul's article on the Stroh violin in the last issue, we referred you to an illustration on page 15 showing the instrument in use. In this case, the player is using a monitoring funnel, much like modern-day headsets are used in recording sessions. The photo didn't show this very well, so we are trying again, blowing up the player by about 65%.



# Marta de la Torre

Not too many years ago, reader Thomas Vendetti located former Edison recording artist Marta de la Torre (Valencia). At the time of their correspondence, Mrs. Valencia was 100 years old and living in Silver Spring, Maryland. Since then, however, he lost track of her, and we are unable to determine whether or not she is still living. (If she is still alive, she would be 103 and probably the oldest living recording artist.) All attempts to learn any more have failed, and we have not even been able to locate a photo good enough to reproduce with this article.

Tom passed along a few materials which we will share so that readers may learn a little more about this interesting, yet obscure, violinist and recording artist. By the way, he is still trying to locate any Edison recordings by violinist Irma Seydel, and can be reached at: P. O. Box 598, N. Carver, MA 02355.

## MARTA DE LA TORRE

MISS MARTA DE LA TORRE, famous Cuban violinist, started her career as a girl prodigy, by touring Cuba. She received her first musical instruction from her parents, Gabriel de la Torre and Lina Campuzano. Then the Cuban government sent her to the Royal Conservatory of Music in Brussels, Belgium. There she studied violin with Cesar Thomson and won four first prizes in violin, harmony and composition.

Later she toured Europe and America, being unanimously acclaimed by the press as one of the greatest women violinists of Latin-America. During her tournee of 24 cities of Spain, she was chosen by Joaquin Turina, the famous Spanish composer, for the premiere of the "Poema de una Sanluquena" in a joint recital, in the theatre San Fernando of Sevilla. While in Madrid she had that rare distinction of being presented to the Royal Family of Spain for whom she played.

In 1925, the President of Cuba, General Machado, honored her by sending her as the representative of Cuba to the Exposition of Arts in Paris.

Miss De La Torre has been engaged three times by the Sociedad Pro-Arte of Havana, and during the last concert (1928) she appeared with Benimiano Gigli. Also appeared as soloist with Symphonic Orchestras in New York, Detroit, Baltimore, Havana, etc.

Miss De La Torre has made records of Cuba and South American music for the Columbia and Edison Companies.

January 11 - 1989

Dear Mr. Vendetti,

I had very much pleasure to receive your nice letter. I don't play very much any more. I am too old. But I play the piano every day - I don't need an accompanist on it. (!)

Mr. Edison came to congratulate me after my performance. There is a recording that I made for Thomas Edison. He like(d it) because of the double stops I played. It is at the Library of Congress. I don't remember the name of the piece or the accompanist. I am sending you a pamphlet with the history of my life.

Thank you again Mr. Vendetti.

Sincerely,

Marta Valencia

\* \* \* \* \*

Of her playing, the New York press had these comments:

New York Herald: A large, full, resonant tone, much good technic and intelligence.

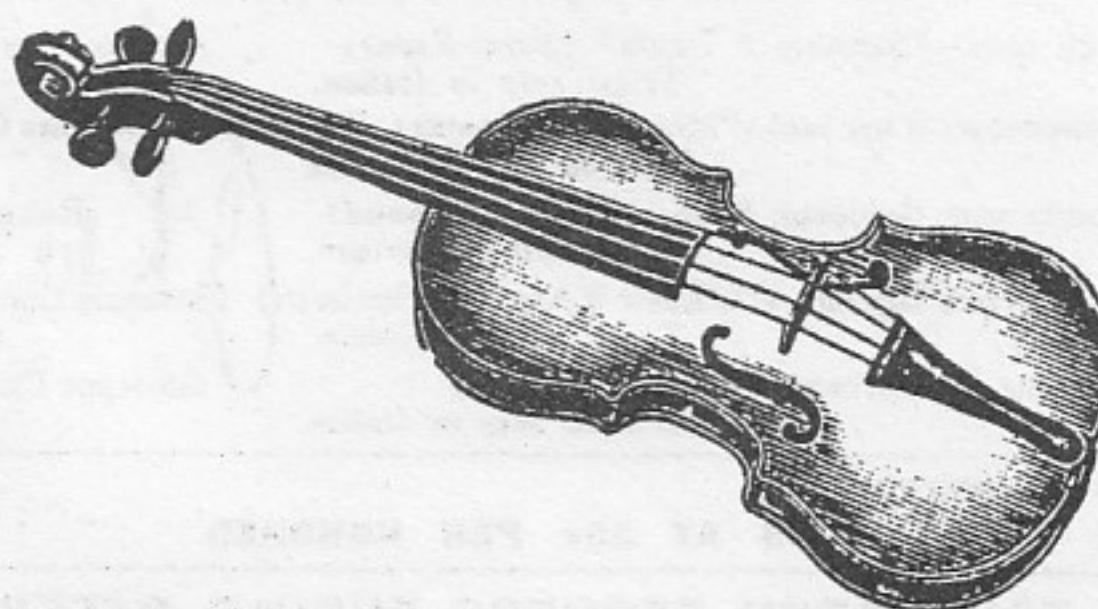
New York Telegram: Her style is broad and positive. A program of excellent merit.

New York World: She uses her left hand with great dexterity.

New York Tribune: A considerable technical proficiency, a skilled left hand, an agile bow, and a sure attack.

Etc., etc.

\* \* \* \* \*



### Recordings of Marta de la Torre (Violin)

#### Edison

<u>date</u>	<u>matrix</u>	<u>title</u>	<u>Diamond Disc #</u>	<u>Blue Amberol #</u>
Nov. 3 1920	7615 " 7616	Menuett (Porpora-Kreisler) Bygone Days	80828*	4816**
Nov. 11 1920	7626 7627	Hindoo Chant — Sadko Canto Amoroso	80615 80653	-- --
Nov. 18 1920	7638 7639	Air — Violin Concerto Mazurka in A Minor	uniss. uniss.	-- --
Oct. 19 1922	8640	La Paloma (with Anibal Valencia, guitar)	51103	4705

\* This number was assigned but not issued; the number went to a Mischa Violin/Helen Ware coupling.

\*\* Released January, 1924 in a "Special export list of Amberol Records made on order for domestic trade."

#### Columbia

Aug.'29 W 97428-2 Ultimo Recuerdo - Habanera (violin duet with Daniel Manso)(piano ac. by Nilo Menendez)  
Col. 3724-X

### Marta de la Torre

(condensed from an article by Victor Vega Ceballos in the Spanish language paper Diario Las Americas, published in Miami. July 3, 1988)

Marta de la Torre, born in Camaguey (Cuba) on the 29th of July of 1888, was the daughter of Don Gabriel de la Torre and Mrs. Lina Campuzano, a Spaniard. Both parents were very cultured and musicians. They founded a conservatory of music which was the first of its class in the province after the end of the war in 1868 which completely left the region in ruins. Puerto Principe or Camaguey was the third area after Santiago de Cuba and Havana to have a musical life.

Marta de la Torre had inquisitive eyes that saw everything around her sharply. After traveling half the world sharing her artistic capabilities, after graduating with high honors from the Royal Conservatory of Music of Brussels in Belgium, where she and her sister Angela were given a scholarship by the provincial government of Havana, she offered her first recitals in the Belgian capital and later gave many concerts in different cities of Cuba until 1913, when she moved to the United States. Angela, a pianist, died in the U.S. and Marta continued her successful career, debuting in the Aeolian Hall in New York on October 29, 1920. She was contracted by the celebrated Society Pro Arts and Music, founded and directed by the unforgettable Maria Teresa Garcia Montes de Bigerga. She spent 1924 to 1926 in Spain and France offering forty concerts in Spain for the Daniel company and was chosen by the great composer Joaquin Turina to premiere his work "Poema de una Sanluquena," which took place in San Fernando, Seville, on the 20th of February of 1925. That same year she represented Cuba in the Paris Exposition of Arts, and on the 27th of May of 1926 made her first presentation in the Gaveau Hall, where she was enthusiastically praised by the public and the Paris critics.

After marrying a Colombian, Anibal Valencia, she settled in the United States. At the University of North Dakota, in September of 1968, at the age of eighty years, she had her last public performance. Since then she has dedicated herself to teaching piano and violin, her favorite instruments.

In the newspaper "La Discussion," which was published in Havana, the theatre critic J. J. Lopez described Marta de la Torre's violin technique: "This artist has an incredible bowing strength. She dominates the bow with incredible security and clean execution and with magisterial strength she dominates dangerous exercises of the double string. Her absolute serenity is inspiring in the most solemn passages. The soul she puts into the execution make Marta de la Torre an immense artist."

She has been widowed since 1952 and now lives in Silver Spring, caring for her only son Manuel. She helps with her experiences and vast knowledge those who aspire to unravel the difficult field of musical arts. Many old and new disciples bring her homage and praise, in her retirement. In a letter to her brother Robertro, president of the Society of French Culture, she wrote: "I never stop playing the piano every day; this makes me feel better, remembering past times. I take care of myself and people admire my vigor at the age of 100."

Our compatriot Marta de la Torre is a living example to new generations of Cubans who can learn from her the optimism that life can bring. She has spent her life giving happiness and understanding to people. A century has passed since she was born in Camaguey until today. Her faith in being able to return to Cuba has not diminished.

### Past Issues - Updates

The "Curiosity Corner" in last winter's issue prompted Dick Spottswood to make some comments: "The Okeh 21000 Irish series commenced in 1921-2 and was suspended after two fiddle solos by George Halpin were issued on #21035 in 1927. The green-wax pressings from 1934-5 are all reissues of couplings from Columbia's 33000-F Irish series in the 1920s. I've managed to account for numbers 21036, 38, 42, 43, 45, 47, 49, 55, 60, 64, 65, 70, 75, 78 and 80 -- and I'd be pleased to hear from anyone who's tracked others. Many, but not all, were further recycled into a Vocalion 84000 series in 1937-8, remaining in print long enough to be repressed on the maroon Okeh label after mid-1940." He adds that he has a copy of Okeh 41455 by the Kalama Quartet as a royal blue pressing with blue label. If readers can add to Dick's blanks in the 21000s, they can write: Dick Spottswood, 6507 43d Ave., University Park, MD 20782.

Dick also commented on the unusual Chinese Victor we showed. "It comes from an expedition to China in 1905 - yes, Zon-O-Phone masters were used for reasons which remain unclear, since all items I've seen are on Victor. The example, 8129-C, is part of a Cantonese opera which was issued on pressings 8129-A, 8129-B, etc., through its conclusion. Poor Nipper was omitted from the trademark because the Chinese consider dogs unclean and unwholesome."

Back in issue #75 (page 8) we ran an article about post-production Blue Amberol records for school use. Writer Bert Pasley has received information concerning six additional numbers:

- 2 Loyalty in Business
- 7 The Finding of Eddie
- 10 Famous Men of History — Alfred the Great
- 15 Good Letters
- 16 Fundamental Conceptions of Science
- 20 The Sales Letter

Numbers 14 and 19 remain unidentified. Bert wishes to thank Kurt Nauck, Bill Feiner and Carl Ratner for this additional information. Questions and comments to: G. F. Pasley, 8828 Pershing Drive #142, Playa del Rey, CA 90291. (310) 822-8764.

Apropos of the article in issue #78 about the repressed Blue Amberols, Allen Koenigsberg writes: "How about a 're-covered' cylinder? I went through my collection of Blue Amberols and found a new category — the cylinder is entitled "Rag, Knock Out Drops" by the Ford Motor Band (recorded September 1915), but the celluloid recording is clearly placed over a previous Blue Amberol cylinder. The result is that the entire cylinder is slightly wider than a typical Blue Amberol (to the amount of the extra layer of celluloid). Since the whole thing is tightly 'shrink-wrapped,' it is impossible to determine what selection is underneath. The outer recording plays fine and fits a regular mandrel."

We goofed in issue #79 when we said that Victor number 22384 by Gus Arnheim's Orchestra was Fred MacMurray's only recorded vocal solo. We checked Brian Rust's dance band discography, and that was the only one listed. However, we didn't go far enough. Both The Complete Entertainment Discography (Rust-Debus) and Michael Corenthal's The Illustrated History of Wisconsin Music show there was a second Victor with vocal by the famous actor: "After a Million Dreams," by George Olsen and His Music (Victor 22248).

# Peter Dawson

## by Russell Smith

To many of us the name Peter Dawson is still synonymous with our favourite ballads: good rollicking numbers, like *Wandering the King's Highway*, *The Floral Dance*, *When the Sergeant Major's On Parade*, and, of course, *The Road to Mandalay*, which can be sung anywhere and be sure of a good reception from the audience.

Peter Dawson's fame is unquestionably linked to his growth as a popular recording artist. He sold more records than anyone in recording history until the advent of *The Beatles*: he has been credited with 3500 songs and sales of 13 million recordings so most Englishmen, New Zealanders and Australians and even some Americans have grown up with the music he recorded, particularly those popular ballads, ballads which evoke a taste of the drawing room, of Masonic Lodge Smoke Nights; of sepia pictures of great-uncle Charlie, thumb in vest, hand on the upright piano, an aspidistra in the background, entertaining relations on some festive occasion. Golden Oldies or Mouldie Oldies, depending on your generation, the list of ballads that most of us know vaguely is very extensive. But that is far from the sum of Peter Dawson's repertoire for he also recorded many classical art songs, oratorio and opera.

Peter Dawson was born in South Australia in January 1882. In an unusually enlightened move he was encouraged to study in England with Charles Santley, who was instrumental in the development of the impeccable technique for which Dawson became famous, and also for introducing him to the concert platform. Why Dawson did not chose to go into opera is a matter of debate which I shall save for another occasion, but he is said to have considered it too much effort for too little return. However, he had an opportunity to test for the newly industrialised recording machine - the two-minute wax cylinder - and proved to be ideally suited for the medium. His recording career began in 1904 and stretched to 1958, into the age of stereophonic recordings.

To make a living he sang anything and everything but not always under the name of Peter Dawson. His first recording was made under the name of **Leonard Dawson**. As **Peter Dawson** he recorded serious music and ballads; as **Hector Grant** he sang the type of Music Hall song made popular by Sir Harry Lauder, such as *Stop Your Tickling Jock*; he also recorded the current Music Hall hits under the name of **Will Strong**, and popular songs such as *Take Me Back To My Boots and Saddle* under the name of **Frank Danby**.

Peter Dawson also composed many ballads himself, which he also recorded. Of these the most famous was *Boots*, published under the name of **J.P. McCall**. J.P. McCall was his favourite *nom de plume* but he also wrote under the names of: **Peter Allison**, **Evelyn Bird**, **Denton Toms**, **Charles Webber**, **Arnold Flint**, **Gilbert Munday**, **Geoffrey Baxter** and **Alison Miller**.

Peter Dawson's activities were not restricted to the recording studio. Both he and the recording companies capitalised on his fame; his tours throughout England, Australia, New Zealand and the Far East were well publicised and very successful.

From the following it is obvious that by 1933 the recording industry - and Peter Dawson - were flourishing. He was touring Australia with a Brazilian pianist with the exotic name of Tapia-Caballera as co-artist; his own accompanist was Hubert Greenslade. The review in *The Australian Musical News* from August 1, 1933 headed *Peter Dawson Sings* begins:

The immensely and deservedly popular bass-baritone, Mr. Peter Dawson, is now so sure of his public that he can afford to disregard their preferences and make them listen to a lot of good music before he satisfies them with - music that is not so good. In this way, Mr. Dawson is doing fine work in the musical education of those who regard "Drum Majors" and "Floral Dances" and the like as fine songs. . . .

He brings to the interpretation - or shall we say, "presentation" - of the feeblest of musical twaddle such a wealth of understanding and vocal address as to make it almost endurable to people who prefer good music, and enormously satisfying to those who don't.

Whatever the taste of the critic may have been "His Master's Voice" advertised 'A Selection of Old Favourites' in the programme, which included *Boots*, *I Travel the Road*, *Cobbler's Song*, *The Floral Dance*, *Room for the Factotum*, and 'some new songs' of which only *Old Father Thames* is familiar to me. In the same programme The

State Bank of Victoria was pleased to advertise that:

You need more than "Boots" When You "Travel the Road"

This sample indicates why one would be curious to learn more about Peter Dawson. I am not a record collector; I am interested in singing and in the songs which Dawson sang. For some time I have considered writing a serious, well-documented book about Dawson which would up-date on his own biography, *50 Years of Song*. I have gathered quite a few articles, programmes, and music and a recent book by the English record collector John D. Vose called *Once a Jolly Swagman*. Peter Burgis, the archivist, who was responsible for the excellent boxed set of Dawson re-recordings under the title *Ambassador of Song*, which celebrated Dawson's centenary, has agreed to become co-author.

To help us, Peter and I would appreciate any information from people who may know something about Peter Dawson. Documentary evidence of any kind, such as personal letters, programmes, reviews, music, photos, would be most useful; anecdotes would also be most welcome. Information should be clearly identified by date, author or other reference and be accompanied by any necessary explanation to ensure that the final publication carries the stamp of authenticity. All contributions will be acknowledged.

We hope that the book will reflect the major contribution which an Australian has made to the development of the recording and concert industry and to the development of the international profile of Australia as a nation of gifted singers.

circa 1100 words

[Note:

Russell Smith is well-known in Australia as an opera singer specialising in bass-buffo roles; he is also Senior Lecturer in Voice at the Tasmanian Conservatorium of Music. Contact address:

University of Tasmania, GPO Box 252C, Hobart, Tasmania 7001.

Peter Burgis, is known nationally in Australia as a Performing Arts Historian and Sound Archivist. He was Senior Archivist at the National Library when he produced *Ambassador of Song*; today he is a freelance consultant. Contact address:

PO Box 1660 Port Macquarie, NSW 2444 ]



PETER DAWSON  
Bass

Dawson, Peter, Bass, Records by		
ADMIRAL'S BROOM, Bevan-Weatherill	23338	60
BANDOLERO, THE, Stuart	23084	60
COME BACK TO ERIN, Claribel, with Ernest Pike, Tenor	23175	60
EXCELSIOR, Balfe, with Ernest Pike, Tenor	23091	60
GOD SAVE THE KING, with National Military Band	2438	60
HEARTS OF OAK, Garrick-Boyer	23333	60
I AM A ROAMER—SON AND STRANGER, Mendelssohn	23164	60
MINER'S DREAM OF HOME, Godwin-Dryden	23044	60
MOON HAS RAISED HER LAMP ABOVE, Benedict, with Ernest Pike, Tenor	23072	60
MY OLD SHAKO, Trotter	3590	60
NAZARETH, Gounod	23147	60
OLD RUSTIC BRIDGE, Skelley, with Ernest Pike, Tenor	23052	60
QUEEN OF THE EARTH, Pinsuti	23127	60
SINGER WAS IRISH, Murphy-Castling	23014	60
SWEET CHRISTMAS BELLS, Shattuck, with Ernest Pike, Tenor	23143	60
THORA, Adams	23002	60
TOREADOR SONG—CARMEN, Bizet	23065	60
TRUMPETER, THE, Dix	23335	60
VOLUNTEER ORGANIST, Lamb	23026	60

Peter Dawson's popularity in the U.S. rated him issues in both the British and domestic series of Edison Blue Amberol records. The photo and listing come from the October, 1919 Edison catalogue.

No. Note The Spiral Stop on Brunswick Records Size Price

(1924 Brunswick Catalogue)



# Elizabeth Lennox

## Contralto

Exclusive Brunswick Artist

**ELIZABETH LENNOX** is, in every sense of the word, a "popular artist." An American contralto, who has received a most comprehensive musical training under some of America's own greatest teachers.

She possesses a clear, true contralto voice, exceptional in its appealing beauty and power and replete with a very evident musical intelligence which could be acquired only through a broad musical education.

Her popularity in concert work is widespread. She sings an unusually large repertoire of oratorios, arias and lyrics, a good percentage of which she has recorded on Brunswick Records.

Fairfield (Conn.) Citizen, March 13, 1992

## Vocal artist celebrates birthday with broadcast tribute

Doug Fox of station WMNR-FM will dedicate his Tuesday, March show "Evening at the Opera" to Fairfield's Elizabeth Lennox Hughes who celebrates her 98th birthday this month. A popular singer of the golden age of radio and later a concert program director, she will be heard performing Rimsky-Korsakov's "A Song of India" from a broadcast of the late 1930s. The birthday tribute and vocal solo will air at 8 p.m. at 88.1

FM from Monroe.

Elizabeth Lennox Hughes was a major artist on network radio and in concert until her retirement in the early 1940s. A contralto, she made her New York debut during World War I, her first recording in 1919, and her bow over the air shortly before NBC was formed in 1926. Born in Ionia, Michigan on March 16, 1894, she has lived in Connecticut for over 65 years. During much of that period, she resided on Morningside Drive and

Sturges Common in Westport.

Mrs. Hughes has been an active member of many organizations and institutions, including South Shore Music Club, Greens Farms Garden Club, The Westport School of Music, Performers of Connecticut and Friends of Music. She also was instrumental in bringing many musical virtuosos to this area for concert programs with the Bridgeport Symphony, Fairfield Pops Orchestra and South Shore Music Club.

The New York Times

MONDAY, MARCH 16, 1992

## Poem Is Whitman's. Is the Voice?

By WILLIAM GRIMES

Two Walt Whitman scholars have found what they say could be a voice recording of the American poet, reading four lines of his 1888 poem "America."

The tape, part of an audiocassette collection of poetry readings, appears to be taken from an NBC radio broadcast from the early 1950's. On the tape, the broadcaster Leon Pearson identifies himself and briefly introduces what he refers to as a wax cylinder recording of Whitman made in 1890.

If authentic, it would be the only known recording of the poet's voice.

Uncertainties about the provenance of the recording, however, cause experts to hesitate before pronouncing it authentic. The cylinder itself has been lost. Although the technique of wax cylinder recording was well established by 1890, Whitman never mentioned making such a tape, nor did any of his contemporaries.

Most specialists in the history of the phonograph agree, however, that the possibility of outright fraud or a hoax is unlikely. Audio experts who have heard the tape say they believe that it is a recording of a wax cylinder. And the poem is obscure even for Whitman scholars, and therefore not a likely choice for anyone concocting a fake.

### A President or an Actor?

But historians of early phonograph recordings cite a number of cylinders initially attributed to a famous personage that later turned out to be performances by actors.

One instance is legendary among historians: a cylinder of President William McKinley's last speech before he was assassinated in 1901. The speech is read not by McKinley but by a celebrated actor of the day, Len Spencer.

The tale of the Whitman tape begins in the early 1980's in Midland, Tex. While researching a paper on the poet's voice, said Prof. Larry Don Griffin, a Whitman scholar and the chairman of Midland College's communications studies division, he came across an audiocassette titled "Voices of the Poets" in the card catalogue of the college's library.

The cassette, produced in 1974 by

Audio-Text, a company in North Hollywood, Calif., that is now defunct, listed readings by Whitman, James Whitcomb Riley and Edna St. Vincent Millay, as well as an interview with William Carlos Williams. In the course of the interview, Williams mentioned his age, allowing Professor Griffin to assign an approximate date of 1951 to the radio broadcasts.

On the tape, Mr. Pearson described the difficulties of lifting an audible

taped version of Whitman's voice from wax cylinder. Archivists at NBC were unable to locate any information about the program.

At the time, Professor Griffin said: "I didn't realize how unusual the tape was. You can find it in community colleges across Texas."

### Trying to Debunk a Notion

In February 1991, Professor Griffin submitted a paper titled "Whitman's Voice" to the Walt Whitman Quarterly Review, edited by Prof. Ed Folsom, another Whitman scholar, who is the chairman of the English department at the University of Iowa. The paper sought to debunk the notion, held by many Whitman biographers, that the poet spoke with what an early biographer, Harrison Morris, called "a high-pitched, unpleasant voice," one that frustrated his ambitions as an orator and led him to poetry instead. Almost casually, Professor Griffin suggested that anyone who wanted to test Morris's theory could simply listen to the Whitman tape. Professor Folsom, recognizing the value of the tape, obtained a copy and has since worked with a number of sound technicians to create a pristine version, which he plans to play at a Whitman conference he is organizing at the University of Iowa on March 26, the 100th anniversary of Whitman's death.

The original tape, which Professor Folsom played for a reporter over the telephone from his home in Iowa City, is remarkably clear and free of distortion. The voice on the tape, in strong, deliberate tones, recites these lines from "America":

Centre of equal daughters, equal sons,  
All, all alike endear'd, grown, un-  
grown, young or old,  
Strong, ample, fair, enduring, capa-  
ble, rich,  
Perennial with the Earth, with  
Freedom, Law and Love.

But is it Whitman?

The voice has a marked New York accent in the words "ample" and "and," pronounced with a broad "a." The word "earth" comes out something like "uth."

The quality of the voice is compatible with a detailed description given by Horace Traubel, who cared for the poet in his final years. He called Whitman's voice "strong and resonant, full of music, a rich tenor."

Moreover, two letters in the archives of the Edison National Historic Site in West Orange, N.J., suggest that Thomas A. Edison was interested in recording Whitman's voice. Acting on Edison's instructions, his secretary, A. O. Tate, sent this letter to Sylvester Baxter, a landscape architect in Malden, Mass., on Feb. 14, 1889:

"Mr. Edison has received your letter of the 8th instant in regard to obtaining a phonographic record of the poet Whitman. He is very much obliged for your suggestion, and will endeavor to carry it out."

The same day, Edison sent this letter to Jesse H. Lippincott, the president of the North American Phonograph Company, which sold and distributed Edison phonographic equipment:

"In reference to the attached letter from Mr. Sylvester Baxter, Do you wish to act upon this gentleman's suggestion, and obtain a phonogram from the poet Whitman?"

### Who Kept What?

There the correspondence ends. No record remains of whether the cylinder was actually made, which is unremarkable, since neither Edison nor Lippincott kept logs or catalogues of cylinder recordings, which at the time were not generally made for commercial purposes, like records today, but as publicity vehicles for the company or keepsakes for those who recorded their voices.

On the tape, Mr. Pearson states that the cylinder came from "the famous Roscoe Haley collection in New York," a collection unknown to experts in the field.

"There's a body of people we know who recorded and whose recordings are lost — Mark Twain is a famous example — but Whitman's name has never been among them," said Samuel Brylawski, reference librarian at the Recorded Sound Reference Center of the Library of Congress. "But the argument that it's from an obscure poem I find compelling."

Mr. Brylawski mentioned two early cylinder recordings that turned up recently. On one, Buffalo Bill Cody argues for American intervention in Cuba in 1898. The other has not been definitively verified, but Mr. Brylawski said he was fairly certain that it was Oliver Wendell Holmes reading "Old Ironsides."

"It's a long shot," Raymond Wile, an authority on the history of the North American Phonograph Company who lives in New York City, said of the authenticity of the Whitman tape. "But more surprising things have happened."

### Our Contest

First of all, we do know our left from our right! The photo which appeared in the last issue was originally planned to appear on a right-hand page. During an unco-operative layout, it wound up on the left, and we neglected to change the photo's introduction.

The participation was low, but nevertheless spirited. We know of thirteen photo members who recorded at one time or another:

1. John Young (prolific recording artist, going back to 2-minute cylinder days as "Harry Anthony;" also a member of Criterion Quartet)
2. George Reardon (recorded with John Young on Edison; also member of Criterion Quartet)
3. Lew White (organist for Brunswick, Hit-of-the Week, Victor)
4. Douglas Stanbury (recorded for Cameo, Victor, and Gennett-Sears labels)
5. Mildred Hunt (recorded for Plaza-ARC and Victor)
6. Gladys Rice (the sweetheart of Edison records!)
7. Erno Rapee (conducted for Brunswick & Hit-of-the-Week)
8. Milton Cross (recorded a few sides for Bluebird)
9. Yasha Bunchuk (not a household name! No one got this obscure 'cellist who made a few sides for Columbia's budget labels circa 1930)
10. Harry Breuer (xylophonist on Emerson)
11. Charles Previn (conducted for Deanna Durbin on Decca)
12. Dorothy Miller (vocalist with Xavier Cugat on Victor)
13. Frederick Fradkin (violin on Brunswick)

We had a 10-i.d. tie between Alan Mueller and Louis Harrison, but Alan's entry was received much earlier. The prize has gone off to him, along with our congratulations...and thanks to all who participated.

### Rare Photos

#### From the Edison Plant

Don Dethleffson

(Note: All photos are from the collection of Henry Ford Museum & Greenfield Village and are printed with their permission.)

#### Photo #1

This photograph shows the Blue Amberol press room on the 5th floor of Edison's record plant at West Orange, New Jersey in August 1929 as the equipment was being dismantled (production of Blue Amberol records ceased in July, 1929). By the late 1920's, Blue Amberol production had dwindled to a shadow of its former self, and the press room probably contained only a small percentage of the equipment present in earlier days. The press room also appears to have become a repository for some of the equipment of the past. In the bottom center of the photo are two glass vacuum bells which were used to gold plate wax master cylinders so that they could be made into metallic master moulds. Note the horseshoe magnets suspended over the glass bells. These magnets rotated an armature within each vacuum bell to which was attached the wax master cylinder. Gold leaf was vaporized within the bell, and thus the rotating wax master was coated evenly with gold. The gold plating or "sputtering" as it was called was discarded in favor of coating the wax master with graphite, a simpler process which did not need to be done

in a vacuum.

Another relic from the past that shows up in the original photo, but which may be hard to see here, is a Kinetophone cylinder press in the center of the photo. The boxes of cylinders stored in the foreground show how records were shipped to jobbers and dealers, though by the middle and late 1920's Blue Amberols were sold by mail order directly from the factory.

To the far left of the photo is a long line of Blue Amberol record presses. More presses can be seen on benches to the far right near the windows. They are in the form of an inverted "L" shape. They are attached to steam and air pipes. Steam was used to soften the celluloid cylinder blanks in the presses, and then air pressure expanded the blanks into the moulds to imprint the sound grooves on the blanks. After five minutes of cooling by air, the finished celluloid record shells were ready to be cored or "backed" with plaster of paris. This was carried out at the rear of the room, out of camera range.

Of all the equipment shown in this photo, only a single record press survives at the Henry Ford Museum. It is about sixteen inches in height and weighs about 100 pounds, being made of cast iron and steel. It is a sturdy machine. I know this because, as I tried to position the press for a photograph, it tipped off a bench and onto the floor where it made quite a dent, but was none the worse for wear itself. However, as it fell it struck me a glancing blow on the head. Had it struck me with full force, I would not be writing about it now. What a poignant end that would have been for a record collector...done in by a Blue Amberol record press!

#### Photo #2

A Diamond Disc recording lathe in operating condition at the Edison factory; various recording horns are also shown.

The large "U" shaped hose on top of the lathe was a suction device to remove wax shavings from the master record. Attached to a vertical rod to the right of the hose is a long spring which can faintly be seen at the rear of the suction hose. The spring served to suspend the recorder over the wax master on the turntable. Exact depth of cut was obtained by a set screw on the recorder itself (see Edison Disc Artists & Records 1910 - 1929, page 95-96 for photos of the recorder.)

Although photographed in the late 1920's (as evidenced by the Edison C-4 radio-phonograph combination which appears at the left rear of the photo), very little electrical recording was being done at West Orange at this time. Virtually all of the commercial recordings were made in New York.

#### Photo #3

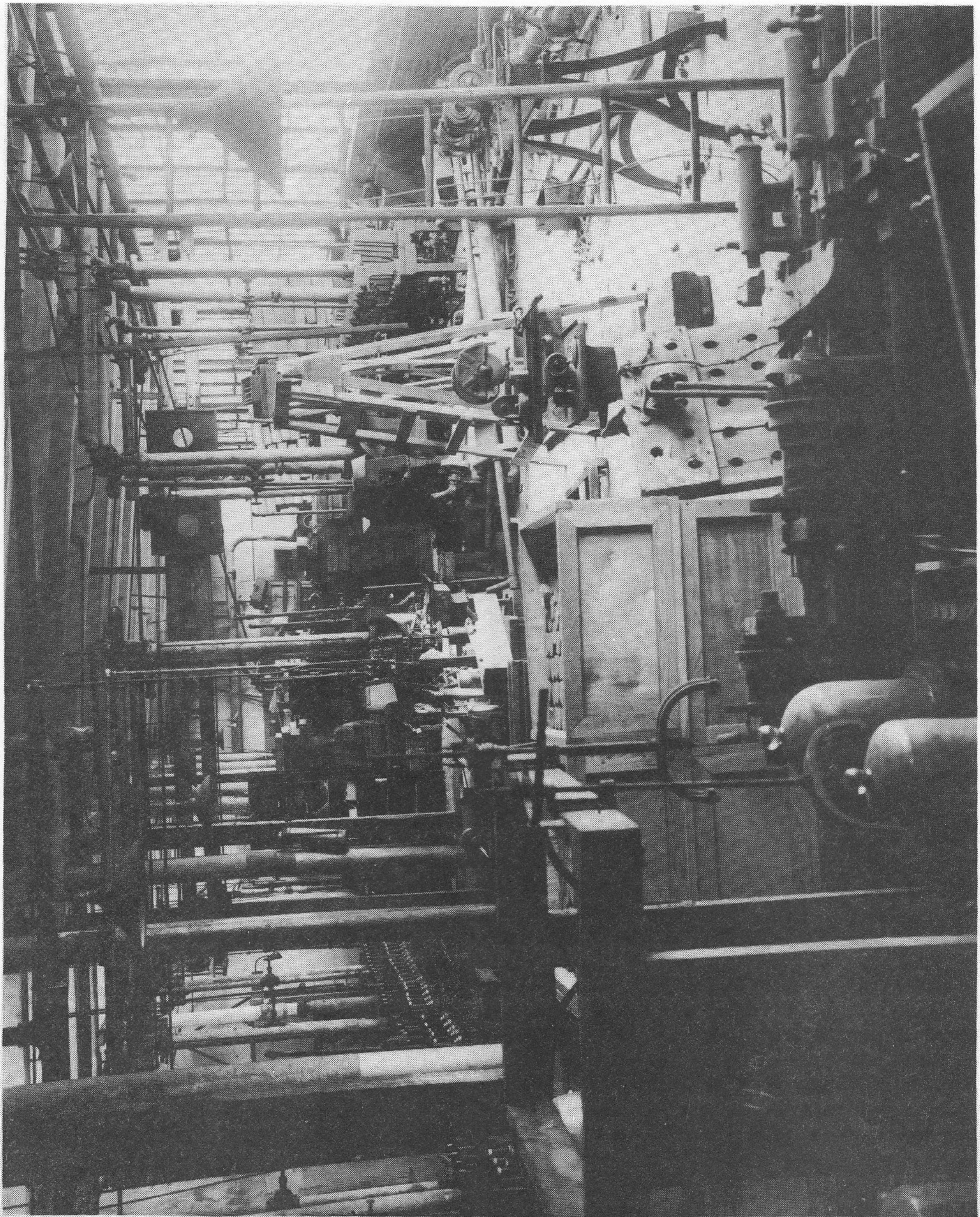
A close-up of photo #2.

#### Photo #4

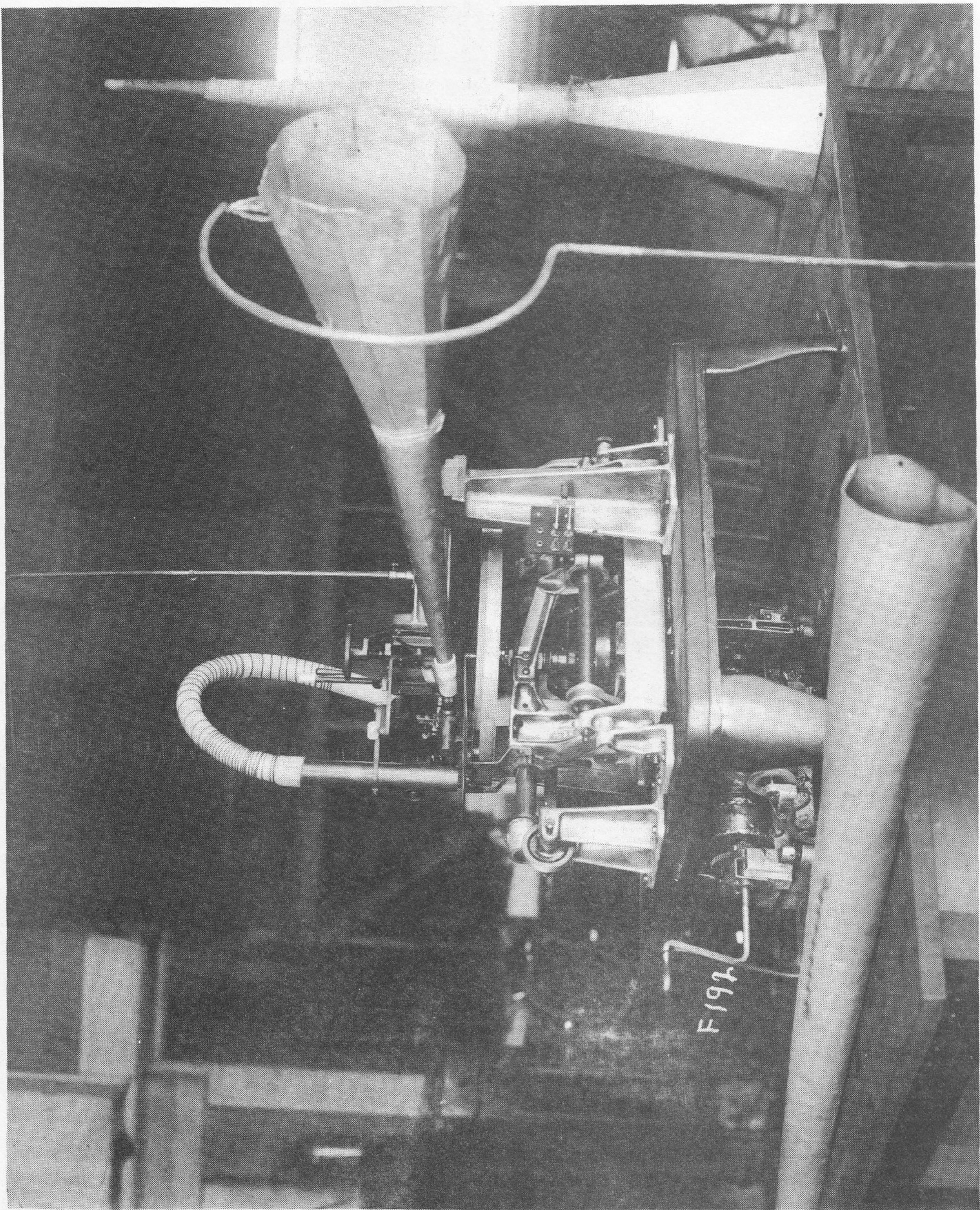
A Diamond Disc phonograph photographed in 1929 as it was being readied for shipment from West Orange to the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, Michigan. The machine does not appear to be in the museum's collection now, however.

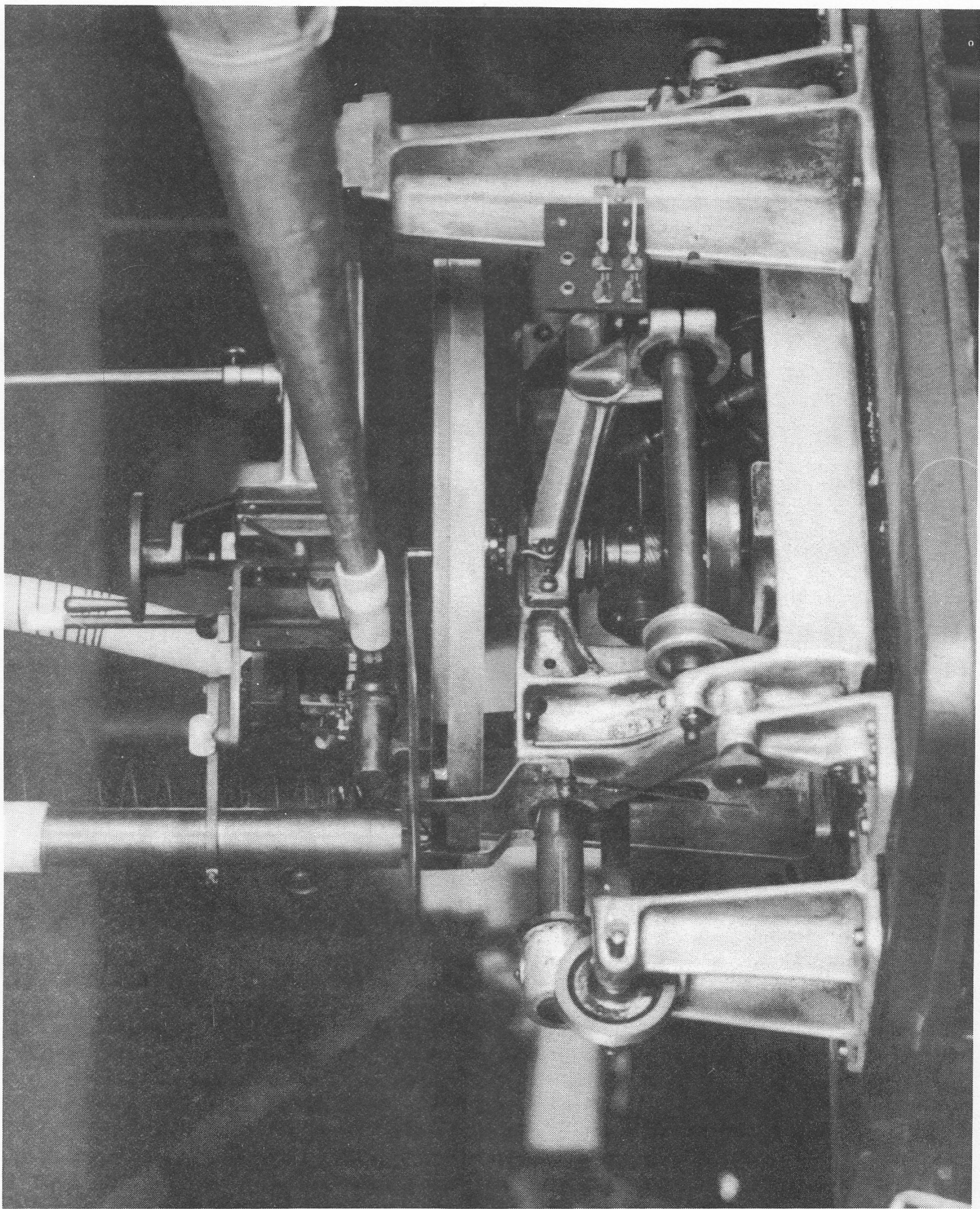
This was perhaps a prototype for a commercial machine or an art model. Access to the turntable compartment was through a top flap lid.

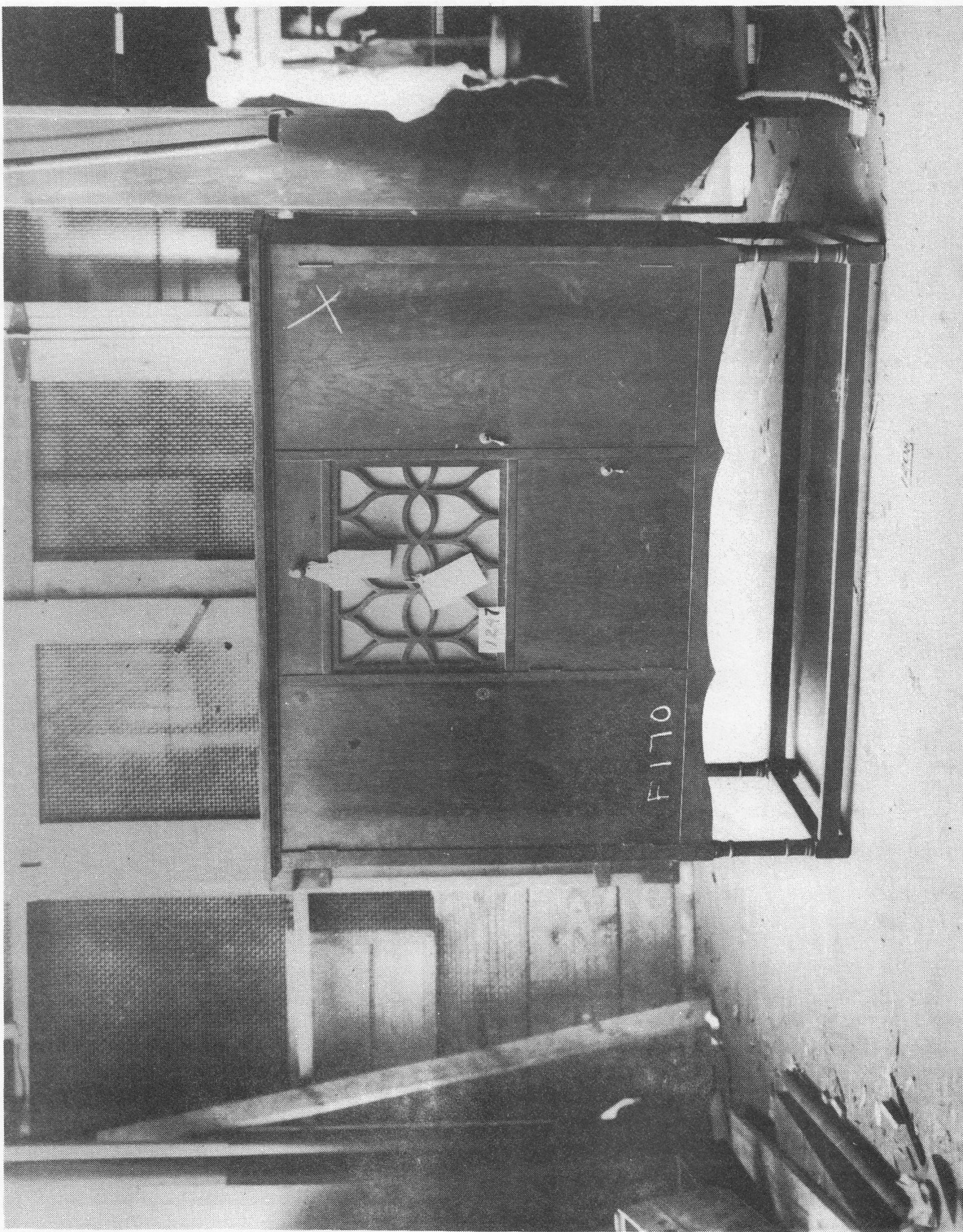
(to minimize bleed-through, we have printed the next four pages on 70 pound paper, rather than the usual 20)



16.







## The Edison Diamond Stylus

by Bob Waltrip

The diamond is a singularly fascinating stone. It is the hardest substance on earth, being comprised of nothing more than sifted layers of carbon that settled upon the young earth, then was crystalized by millions of years of billions of tons of hot pressure. Nothing will cut a diamond except another diamond; yet, since it was made in layers, it has grain, similar to the grain in wood. One can split a wooden plank in two with one stroke of a meat cleaver by striking in end-grain. In the same fashion, any sharp edge that strikes the end grain on a diamond can cleave it. This frangibility is the diamond's only weakness, but is its greatest asset to jewelers. Without this characteristic, gem stones that are cut into complicated prisms would be impossible to achieve. A diamond is also fragile in the sense that any strong shock can cause it to cleave along the grain. Although it is the world's hardest substance, if one had a diamond that was large enough to use as an anvil, a farrier's hammer would completely destroy it in less than a day.

For the purpose of this treatise, I shall limit my observations to the industrial-grade diamonds that Edison used to make styli out of. Industrial-grade diamonds are those that are less than perfectly clear, and contain such flaws as cracks, fissures, and air bubbles. Since a diamond will cleave if struck end-grain, the very best Edison stylus is one that has its grain perpendicular to the record surface, and contains no wide fissures, nor craters caused by cutting through an air bubble. Since a diamond is a crystal, an air pocket inside it is approximately the hexagonal shape of a lead pencil, containing sharp edges that cannot be reached by polishing.

In order, I presume, to get the most styli out of the least amount of material, Edison made his styli just any old way, so long as they had smooth playing points. In order to avoid fissures and air pockets, some styli were made with their grain more or less parallel to the record surface, instead of perpendicular to it. Since Edison was selling new records, he was not concerned that a chipped or badly scratched record would cleave the stylus.

Seventy-five years have passed, and it is time for us to worry. The purpose of this paper is to implore every collector never to play any chipped or badly scratched record, cylinder or disc. If your good Amberola stylus is cut side-grain, and it falls into a chip at 180 RPM, the sharp rear edge of the chip will strike the end grain of your stylus at the speed of a diamond cutter's blow. Your stylus will eventually cleave. Once cleaven, its incredibly sharp point will engrave away the surface of every record that it touches.

It is quite easy to test the condition of any Amberola or Diamond Disc stylus. For the Amberola, choose a record that has a clean and un-scratched run-off rim. Clean this area with cigarette lighter fluid, then polish it with a soft rag. Clean your stylus with alcohol on a Q-Tip. With the record turning, set the stylus down in the last groove, then let it run onto the run-off rim, and turn a few turns. Remove the record and examine it in strong light. If your stylus is cleaven, it will have engraved a series of faint grooves into the surface. If you see these grooves, try to rub them off with your thumb, in case the stylus merely scratched away some grease that was

left from improper cleaning.

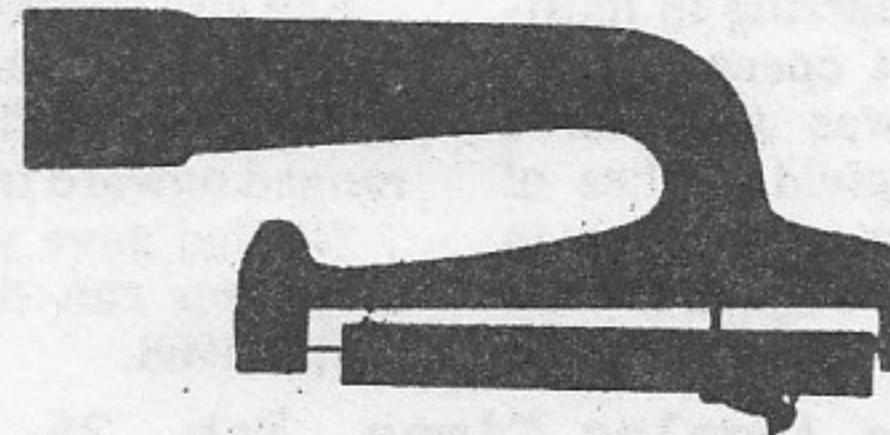
Testing the Diamond Disc stylus is similarly easy. Choose a record that has an un-scratched run-off rim between grooves and label. Clean the area with spray Windex, clean stylus, and test as above. By putting a strong light onto your turntable, you can watch the stylus leave the groove and start skating on the smooth rim. If the stylus is cleaven, you can see the faint white grooves being engraved into the record.

The force and friction of playing records is a continual polishing process to the Edison stylus, and after awhile even a diamond will wear flat on its tip. The Edison record groove is a U-shaped trough, and the stylus must be exactly the same shape, so as to contact it evenly. If the stylus is worn flat, only its sharpened sides will touch the sides of the groove, splaying them apart, and grinding them out.

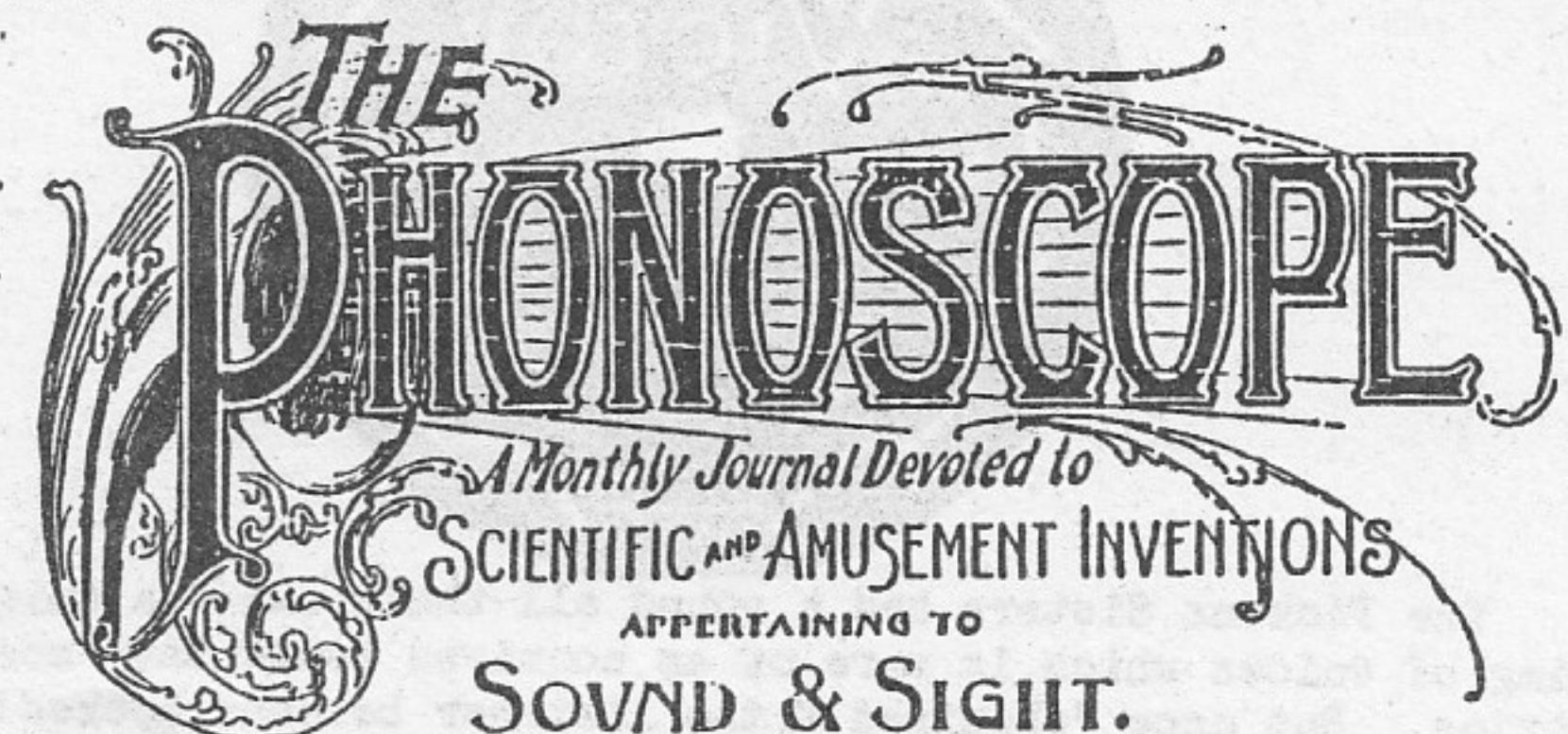
It is not always possible to detect a worn stylus on the Amberola, but one can test for it on the Diamond Disc. With a strong light on the turntable, set a clean record to playing. If the stylus is worn, you can see the grooves turning faintly white as they are played.

Because of the advertising slogan "a diamond is forever," some collectors might think that this applies to their Edison styli. 'Tain't so. The styli wear out much faster than people realize, particularly the Diamond Disc. I play my Diamond Disc machine for several hours each day, enjoying hundreds of good-condition records. I have found that the best new diamond stylus is usable for no more than two or three months.

It is possible to enjoy the Edison phonographs without inducing any record wear, but only if the reproducer has been restored to function flawlessly at every compliance point, and only if one is careful and watchful of its stylus. I advise all of my clients to scratch-test their styli often. This should certainly be done after each time that one accidentally allows the stylus to hit a chip or deep scratch. Also, before each playing session, the Diamond Disc stylus should be cleaned by scraping with a piece of 400 grit Wetordry sandpaper. Because all diamond styli contain small cracks and fissures, it is possible for a piece of foreign matter to lodge in a crack and grind away records. The sandpaper will dislodge any potential record ruiner.



Bob Waltrip can be contacted at Box 1404, Levelland, Texas 79336.



(Do you have yours yet? See advertising section!)

## Obituaries

### Jane Pickens; Popular Singer in Big Band Era

By BURT A. FOLKART  
TIMES STAFF WRITER

Jane Pickens, credited with being the most talented of radio's three singing Pickens Sisters and who later toured the country in a series of operettas and musicals, has died at her home in Newport, R.I.

She was 83 and a family spokesman said she died Friday of heart failure after a long illness.

During the 1930s and '40s, Jane, Helen and Patti Pickens—whose Macon, Ga., parents taught them harmony when they were small children—ranked with the Andrews, Boswell and DeMarco sister acts for airwaves acclamation.

They, and the vocal groups from such bands as Glenn Miller, Tommy Dorsey and Paul Whiteman's, could be heard on any of four radio networks during almost any hour of prime-time radio.

The Pickens Sisters originally performed at churches and small auditoriums in Georgia. But a test recording for RCA Victor brought them to the attention of radio producers who initially promoted them as "Three Little Maids From Dixie."

But after earning more than \$1 million in a five-year period, the group disbanded when two of the sisters married.

Jane Pickens continued her career as a soloist on "Ben Bernie, the Old Maestro" and "The Chamber Music Society of Lower Basin Street" variety shows. She also had a daily radio show on NBC, which she taped in New York so she could tour the country starring in musical comedies, light operas and in nightclubs. She was a featured singer in the Ziegfeld Follies of 1936, played opposite Ed Wynn in "Boys and Girls Together" on Broadway, and in 1949 starred in

*Los Angeles Times, Feb. 25, 1992*



The Pickens Sisters had a sound all their own—a unique blending of voices which is more of an acquired taste than most vocal trios. But once "acquired," the listener becomes hooked!

Molly Picon's first documented recordings were in 1923 for Pathé. She went on to make records in the ethnic series for Emerson, Victor and Columbia. For a complete listing of her early work, see Dick Spottswood's *Ethnic Music on Records*.



Jane Pickens in 1943

"Regina," a musical adaptation of "The Little Foxes."

By then, she told The Times in 1951 when she was starring in "The Merry Widow" in Los Angeles, it had been so long since she had lived in the South that "I had to relearn my accent all over again" for her role as the vitriolic Regina.

In the 1950s, as her career wound down, Jane Pickens became a society figure, arts patron and philanthropist (two of her three husbands were well-to-do businessmen), working on behalf of the Salvation Army and for research on heart disease and cerebral palsy. A daughter from her first marriage, who survives her as does her sister Patti, suffers from cerebral palsy.

Miss Pickens even ventured into politics, running unsuccessfully as a Republican-Conservative challenger to Rep. Edward I. Koch in 1972 in the wealthy Manhattan district he represented before becoming mayor of New York City.

She also successfully painted and held one-woman shows of her landscapes and floral works, which ranged upward from \$500.

"If God gave you a lot of talent, then you can do anything," she said in 1968.

New York Times, April 7, 1992

### Molly Picon, an Effervescent Star Of the Yiddish Theater, Dies at 94

By MURRAY SCHUMACH

Molly Picon, the comedic actress and singer who lightened and brightened the often dolorous themes of Yiddish theater with shows that were sprightly operettas, died yesterday in Lancaster, Pa. She was 94 years old.

She died in her sleep at the home of her sister, Helen Silverblatt, said Seymour Rexite, president of the Hebrew Actors Union.

Miss Picon, who was an indefatigable performer well into her 80's, had a stage career that dated from first efforts when she was 5 years old. With her sparkling ganayvishe oygen, or mischievous eyes, and her sturdy delivery of Yiddish songs with appropriate gestures and intonation, she reigned supreme in more than 200 productions along the Yiddish theater row that was lower Second Avenue during the 1920's.

She also appeared on Broadway, achieving her most notable success in a two-season run of "Milk and Honey," a hit musical that opened in 1961, when she was in her mid-60's. When she co-starred with Robert Morley in a London production of "A Majority of One," she was acclaimed by critics.

But it was in Yiddish theater, where audiences often measured their enjoyment by the volume of tears on both sides of the footlights, that Miss Picon established an international reputation by playing for laughs.

#### An Idol in Jewish Neighborhoods

To millions of Jews in major cities of the United States, Europe, South America, Africa and Australia, "our Molly" meant the slender, vivacious comedian with the dark, dancing eyes and elfin face whose songs, dances and mimicry provided hilarious joy. Among the songs she helped turn into hits were "The Story of Grandma's Shawl" and "The Working Goil." She was idolized in Jewish neighborhoods, where children and clubs were named after her during her heyday in the 1920's.

Hers was the expansive, emotional style that would have been restricted by the colder performances tailored to the realism of Broadway. When she performed her first English-speaking starring role, in 1940 in Sylvia Regan's drama "Morning Star," Brooks Atkinson, who did not care for the show itself, wrote about Miss Picon in The New York Times, "To coin a phrase, she is a darling."

This was the universal sentiment that she aroused in critics and audiences alike with her talent for generating warmth and rapport. Miss Picon loved the uninhibited audiences of the Yiddish theater.

She had a flair that averted staleness and repetition. On the Yiddish stage, she used Broadway dance routines as much as possible and flooded the dialogue with English. Jacob Kalich, her husband and colleague from 1919 until his death in 1975, wrote more than 40 scripts for her, and Joseph Rumshinsky, the well-known composer, did most of her music. Mr. Kalich wrote for her one of her most sustained presentations, the play "Yankele," a sort of Yiddish Peter Pan story in which she portrayed a little boy. She later said she had appeared in it 3,000 times, a figure that might be taken merely to mean that it went on quite often.

#### Her Yiddish Was Acquired

Curiously, Miss Picon had to develop her knowledge of Yiddish. She was born on Broome Street, on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, on June 1, 1898, to an immigrant couple. They moved to Philadelphia when she was a child, a migration that made her English sound a bit alien in later years to Jews with the accent of East Side New York.



Green Film Production, 1936

Molly Picon in the Yiddish musical "Yiddle With a Fiddle."

At the age of 5, Miss Picon won a teddy bear in a burlesque-house amateur program. Her mother recognized her talent and encouraged her, and young Molly started singing for 50 cents a night.

At age 15 she joined a Yiddish repertory company and toured as Topsy in "Uncle Tom's Cabin," switching languages—English or Yiddish—to suit the ears of the audience. Because she thought of a future in English-language theater, Miss Picon drifted into the cross-country vaudeville circuits, where she perfected her timing and her uncanny instinct for audience response.

#### Made a Film With Sinatra

Her career changed suddenly when her vaudeville troupe was stranded in Boston. There Mr. Kalich persuaded her to join the Yiddish company he managed. After their marriage she went with him, in 1919, to Eastern Europe, where she perfected her Yiddish. Upon their return in 1923, she made her stage debut as the star of "Yankele."

In more recent decades, Miss Picon did less Yiddish theater, of which there was less to do. After "Milk and Honey" she worked mostly in English-language undertakings, in such plays as "Paris Is Out" in 1970 and "Something Old, Something New" (later called "The Second Time Around") in 1977 with Hans Conried. She appeared in the films "Come Blow Your Horn," which starred Frank Sinatra, and "For Pete's Sake," with Barbra Streisand.

In 1959, after an interval of many years, she returned to Second Avenue to star in a Yiddish vehicle, "The Kosher Widow." She wrote the lyrics to the music by Sholom Secunda, and the book was by Mr. Kalich and Louis Freiman. She had two roles in it, and the audience determined the story's outcome with an applause meter.

Miss Picon was particularly touched in 1946 when she and her husband were among the first entertainers to visit European camps for displaced people.

As she recalled in an interview years after the visit, "A woman came up with a child and said, 'My child is 2 years old and she has never heard the sound of laughter.'"

Her husband told Miss Picon: "Molly, that's our job. Make them laugh!"

In 1960, "Molly!," an autobiography written with Jean Bergantini Grillo, was published by Simon & Schuster.

Miss Picon is survived by her sister.

New York Times, April 5, 1992

## Milton R. Rackmil, 86, Is Dead: Led Decca Records and Universal

By BRUCE LAMBERT

Milton R. Rackmil, a co-founder of Decca Records and head of Universal Pictures for two decades, died on Thursday at the DeWitt Nursing Home in Manhattan. He was 86 years old.

He died of a stroke, his family said.

Mr. Rackmil was born on the Lower East Side and grew up in Brooklyn. He studied nights at New York University to become an accountant.

In the 1920's he joined Brunswick Radio Corporation in Manhattan. He became chief comptroller and general manager of its plant in Scranton, Pa., and helped form the Brunswick Record Corporation in 1932.

He and two others founded Decca in Manhattan in 1934. He began as treasurer, became vice president in 1945 and executive vice president in 1946 and president in 1949.

### Felt Radio Would Help Records

Many people thought at the time that radio programs were making records at home obsolete, but Mr. Rackmil believed that radio would spur demand for records. And while some studios saved money by using little-known musicians, he preferred top names. The company adopted a policy of 35-cent records with a hit tune on each side.

Decca flourished, becoming an industry leader in popular music and boasting a lineup of many swing era headliners. They included Bing Crosby, Ella Fitzgerald, Glenn Miller, Guy Lombardo, the Dorseys, Duke Ellington, Count Basie, the Mills Brothers, Al Jolson, the Andrews Sisters, Woody

Herman, Lawrence Welk, the McGuire Sisters, Teresa Brewer, Ethel Waters and the Four Aces.

In the midst of the company's success, the Federal Government filed an antitrust suit against Decca, its overseas sponsor, Decca Records Company of London, and a third company, charging that they had divided up international markets in a noncompetitive cartel. In a 1952 consent decree, they ended the practices.

Applying his optimism to a new venture, Mr. Rackmil tackled the film industry, which some believed was destined for extinction because of the rise of television. Movies were entering a troubled period of expensive productions and the breakdown of the studio-contract star system.

### Cary Grant Replaces Mule

Mr. Rackmil entered the fray in 1951 when Decca became the biggest owner of Universal Pictures Company. He took over as president in 1952.

He shifted the studio from B-grade productions, with the likes of Ma and Pa Kettle and Francis the Talking Mule. Universal's bigger, slicker productions began starring actors like Cary Grant, James Stewart, Kirk Douglas, Doris Day and Rock Hudson. The films included "Spartacus," "The Glenn Miller Story," "That Touch of Mink" and "Pillow Talk."

He also engineered the sale in which Screen Gems bought the television rights to Universal's 600 pre-1948 films. His difficult moments included a



Kas Heppner, 1957

proxy fight at Decca in 1954 and the winter of 1957-58, when he shut down Universal's productions and fired hundreds of workers.

Eventually MCA bought Decca and Universal in 1962. Mr. Rackmil became vice-chairman of MCA's board and remained the head of both the film and record companies until his retirement in 1972. He was active in the Friars Club and also served as president of the Record Industry Association.

He was previously married and divorced. Surviving are his wife of 17 years, the former Joan Crane; a daughter, Marlene Salkin of Fort Lauderdale, Fla.; a brother, Bernard, of Palm Beach, Fla.; a stepson, David Crane of Los Angeles; three grandchildren, and seven great-grandchildren.

Just as we were going to press, we learned of the death of Sam Price, at the age of 83, in New York City. Price's first recordings were made during a Brunswick-Vocalion visit to Dallas in 1929. In the late 1930s and 40s he recorded extensively for Decca, both as Sam Price and His Texas Blusicians and for various other sessions. Some of the musicians he worked with during this period were Lester Young, Buster Bailey, Charlie Shavers and Sidney Bechet, as well as singers Georgia White, Trixie Smith, Big Joe Turner, etc.

Theodore Blume passed away in Brooklyn recently at the age of 75. He played violin with the Sigmund Romberg orchestra in the 1930s and went on to work with Paul Whiteman and Gene Krupa. In later years he played in the orchestra on the Jackie Gleason television program.

## HERE & THERE

### Upcoming Events

**May 16** - Midwest Antique Record & Phonograph Show, Zion, Illinois. For complete details, see ad on back page of this issue.

**August 9** - California Antique Phonograph Society's 8th Annual Phonograph Show & Sale at the Pasadena Center Conference Building, 300 E. Green St., Pasadena, California. For more information, contact Dan Reed, 841 S. Los Robles Ave., Pasadena, CA 91106. (see center of second section)

**August 6, 7 & 8** - International Association of Jazz Record Collectors' Annual Conference, to be held in New Orleans. The conference will be held at the Bourbon Orleans Hotel in the old French Quarter and will honor Bill Russell and George H. Buck, Jr. The jazz conclave will include entertainment by New Orleans musicians, jam sessions, screenings of historical jazz films, panel discussions, jazz related city tours, and a gala banquet. Further information can be had from convention chairman Gus Statiras, 1304 Fletcher Rd., Tifton, GA 31794.

**August 14 & 15** - Michigan Antique Phonograph Society's Phonovention-92 at the Doherty Hotel in Claire, Michigan. For further details, contact Ken Stokes, Box 17, Fowlerville, MI 48836. (517) 223-8417.

**August 15** - 3rd Annual Old-Time Radio & Phonograph Show, Campbell Hall, N.Y. Sponsored by Hudson Valley Antique Radio & Phonograph Society. More information can be obtained from: Linda Gramm, Box 1, Campbell Hall, NY 10916.

**September 27** - Lynn Bilton's automated music show at the Holiday Inn North at New Jersey's Newark International Airport. Contact Lynn Bilton at Box 25007, Chicago, IL 60625.

Frederick Crane and William Shaman have joined forces to document the output of two Iowa City-based record labels: Claxtonola and National. They would appreciate hearing from readers who have details on either of these early 1920s brands. Please drop Fred a postcard giving the record numbers you have access to; he will then contact you if further information is needed. Write: Frederick Crane, 930 Talwrn Ct., Iowa City, IA 52246. (Yes, "Talwrn" is correct!)

The Vitaphone Project has been established to locate and catalogue Vitaphone and other early sound track discs. Although their prime interests are in short films from the beginning of the commercially successful period (1926), they will note all sound discs that are located, including those from feature films and pre-Vitaphone companies. Among other goals, they have launched a newsletter to keep institutions and individuals informed of developments.

Do you have any film soundtrack discs, production information, stills, or other ephemera on pre-1940 short films? If so, this information is urgently needed for a major film restoration program. All replies will be kept confidential. Project endorsed by the copyright owners. For more

For more information, or to supply data, write: The Vitaphone Project, c/o Ron Hutchinson, 5 Meade Court, Piscataway, NJ 08854.



## IN REVIEW

### A Review of "The Great Singers of the World"

It is with great pleasure that I received a copy of Definitive Transfer's recording of these classic Victor Red Seal recordings from the early part of this century. This handsome cassette and poster set form a perfect tribute to the excellence of the Red Seal series of operatic recordings as it approaches its 90th anniversary.

The poster is an enlarged reproduction of an advertisement that appeared in early editions of the Victor Book of the Opera to attest to the fact that "the world's greatest singers record for Victor". The accompanying cassette presents full recordings of the singers pictured on the print. This cassette more than any other recording I know of on the market today gives an excellent overview of the operatic environment of the 1900-1914 period. There are 25 singers represented in very high quality re-mastering of the original acoustic discs. I am quite impressed with the selections Mr. Payer chose to represent each singer. Especially pleasing are recordings by Clement, Dalmore, Tetrazzini, Gadski, Ruffo, and one of the famous McCormack/Kreisler collaborations. Also represented are Goritz and Sammarco, two singers often overlooked by more recent historical reissues.

The quality of the transfers is remarkably clear and brilliant, without some of the blasting on high and fortissimo passages all too common on acoustical recordings. There is none of the artificial enhancement that is found in the current Nimbus reissues of the great singers, nor the noisy, naked quality of the Pearl reissues. This interesting collection is the first in what I hope to see become a very successful series of reissues by Mr. Payer. This limited edition cassette can be obtained by contacting Michael Payer at Definitive Transfers, 550 Franklin Avenue Suite B-6, Hartford, CT 06114.

- Andrew Andrade

ANDREW ANDRADE is an active singer and voice teacher who is currently pursuing a Master's degree at New England Conservatory of Music. He has been collecting historical classical recordings for fifteen years and has given several lectures on the great singers of the past.

### Recently Received

The toy gramophone kit, also from Definitive Transfers, arrived awhile ago. While we haven't yet assembled it, the kit contains everything needed to put it together except scissors and glue. The main parts are wooden, and the kit even contains sandpaper and felt discs for the bottom of the base. And, of course, there's a record included so you can demonstrate your little machine once its finished. Although a toy, the parts appear to be well designed and well made. Available for \$19.95 plus \$3.00 postage & handling from Definitive Transfers, 550 Franklin Ave., Suite B-6, Hartford, CT 06114.

From Greenwood Press comes Sarah Vaughn: A Discography by Denis Brown. The book covers some 750 songs recorded by Miss Vaughn between 1944 and 1989, along with all other pertinent data. For more information, contact Greenwood Press, Inc., 88 Post Road West, Box 5007, Westport, CT 06881, or your local bookstore.

(1897 ad)

### "A Visit from the Edison Service Man"

by G. F. Pasley

A number of years ago I purchased an Edison Diamond Disc Phonograph, model C-250, which had been modified in 1927 to allow the use of the long playing Edison records. This involved both the installation of the appropriate gearing to feed the horn/reproducer assembly across the record at the correct rate (450 grooves per inch) and the use of a special reproducer (engraved LONG on top) with a fine diamond point. In an effort to get the closest to the original sound, I had the reproducer reworked (new diaphragm and new gaskets); and, in addition, sent the needle bar to Expert Pickups in England for a new diamond since there was some repeating on some of the long play records.

When the reworked needle bar was installed, however, the diamond point was found to cut the record (this was also a constant problem at the factory in 1927).\* The needle bar installation was checked and found to be proper, so the problem had to be with the diamond point itself. Therefore, it was returned to England for rework. Expert Pickups replaced the diamond with careful attention to insuring it was formed to the original factory specifications. However, when it was reinstalled in the reproducer, it still cut the record. During discussions of these problems with Ron Dethlefson (who has reprinted the original installation instructions, "The New Edison Long Playing Phonograph"), he volunteered to check the horn/reproducer alignment relative to the feed gearing in the event the record cutting was being caused by misalignment or any other type of mechanical problem.

After removing the whole mechanical assembly from the case, he went through the factory instructions, step by step, to assure himself that everything was still "as it should be." All was correct except for the instruction to interchange two set screws (page 6, line 10, for those of you who have a copy of the instruction book). It was difficult to understand what difference this would have in the machine's operation (which was evidently also the opinion of the installer in 1927). However, when reassembled, a chronic problem had gone away. Anytime, after playing a standard record, when one moved the reproducer back to the beginning of the record, the long play gear change lever would automatically move to the "long" position. I had thought that this was a planned feature to prevent accidental playing of long play records with the standard gearing, but this was evidently not the case.

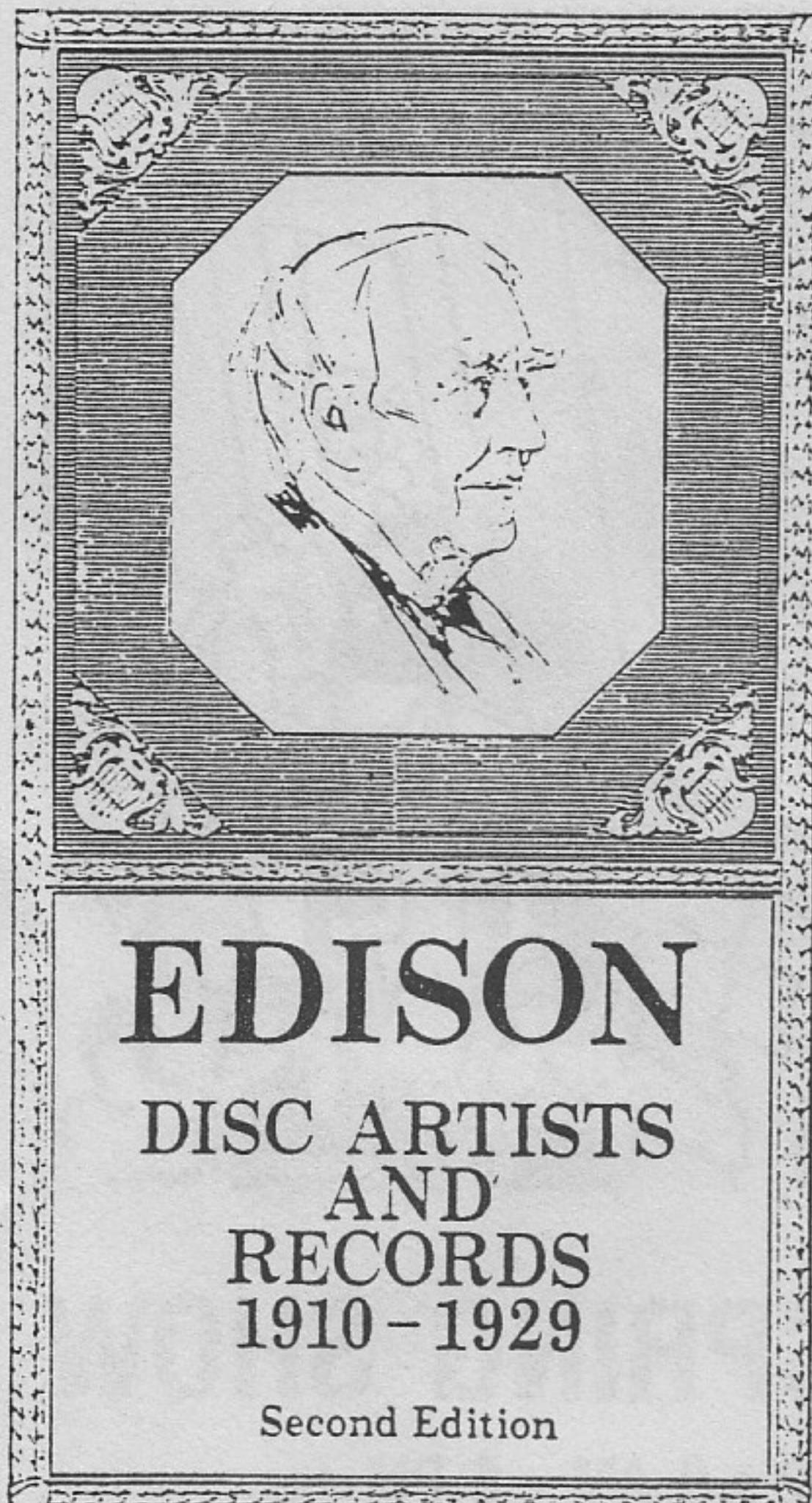
In any event, although the replaced diamond point still cut the record, the repair effort was not all in vain. At the suggestion of Expert Pickups an attempt was made to "wear in" the diamond point by playing the already damaged long playing record many times. This was unsuccessful; however, I was lucky to find another reproducer with an original diamond point so I can now enjoy my long playing records again.

\*It should be noted that, in addition, 3 "standard play" diamond points were replaced at the same time and function properly.

May will be "Catch-Up Month" for us! We will be filling orders for back issues, requests for information, and hope to put a good dent in a pile of overdue correspondence. Thank you for your patience.

# EDISON DISC ARTISTS & RECORDS

1910-1929



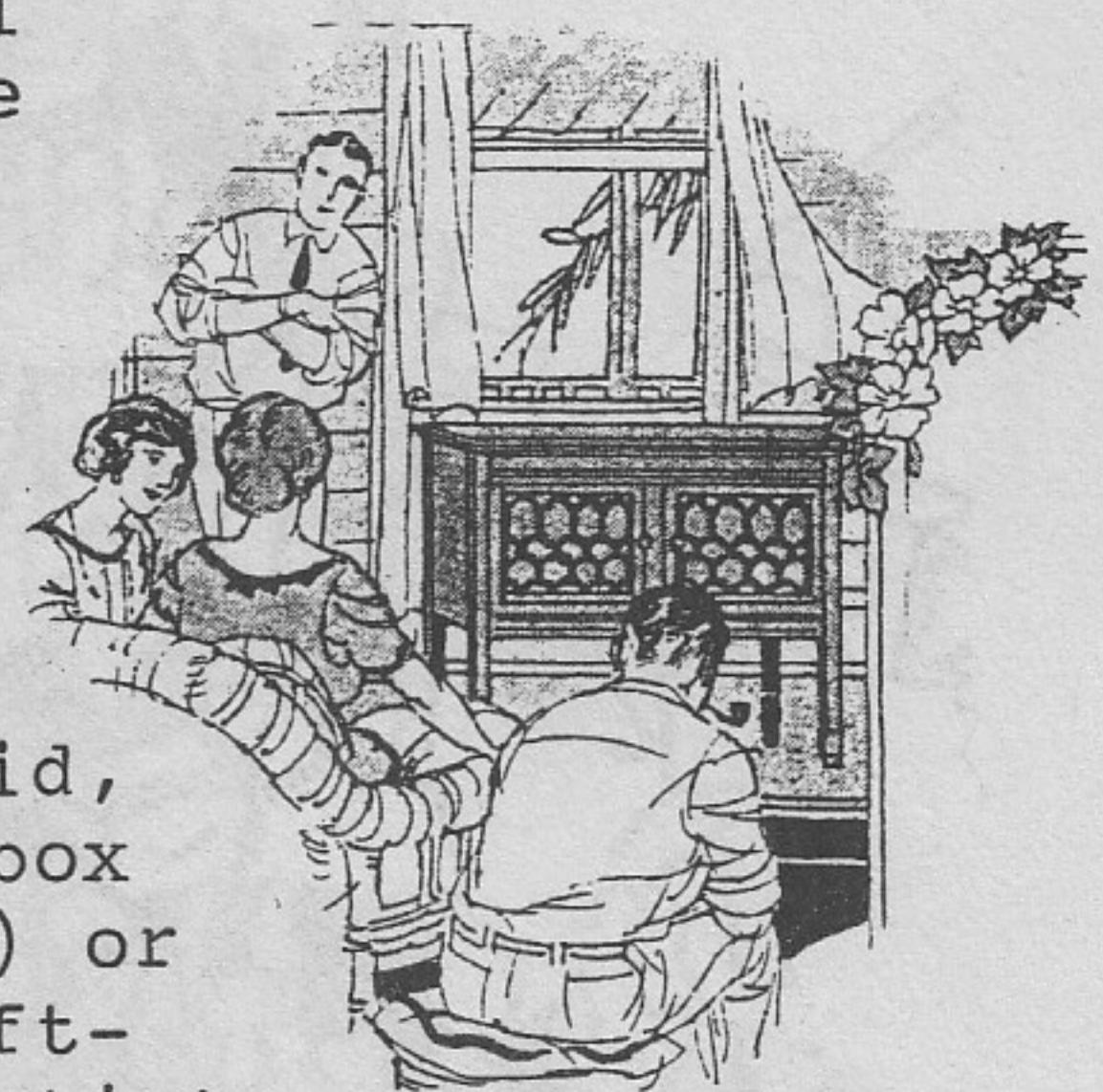
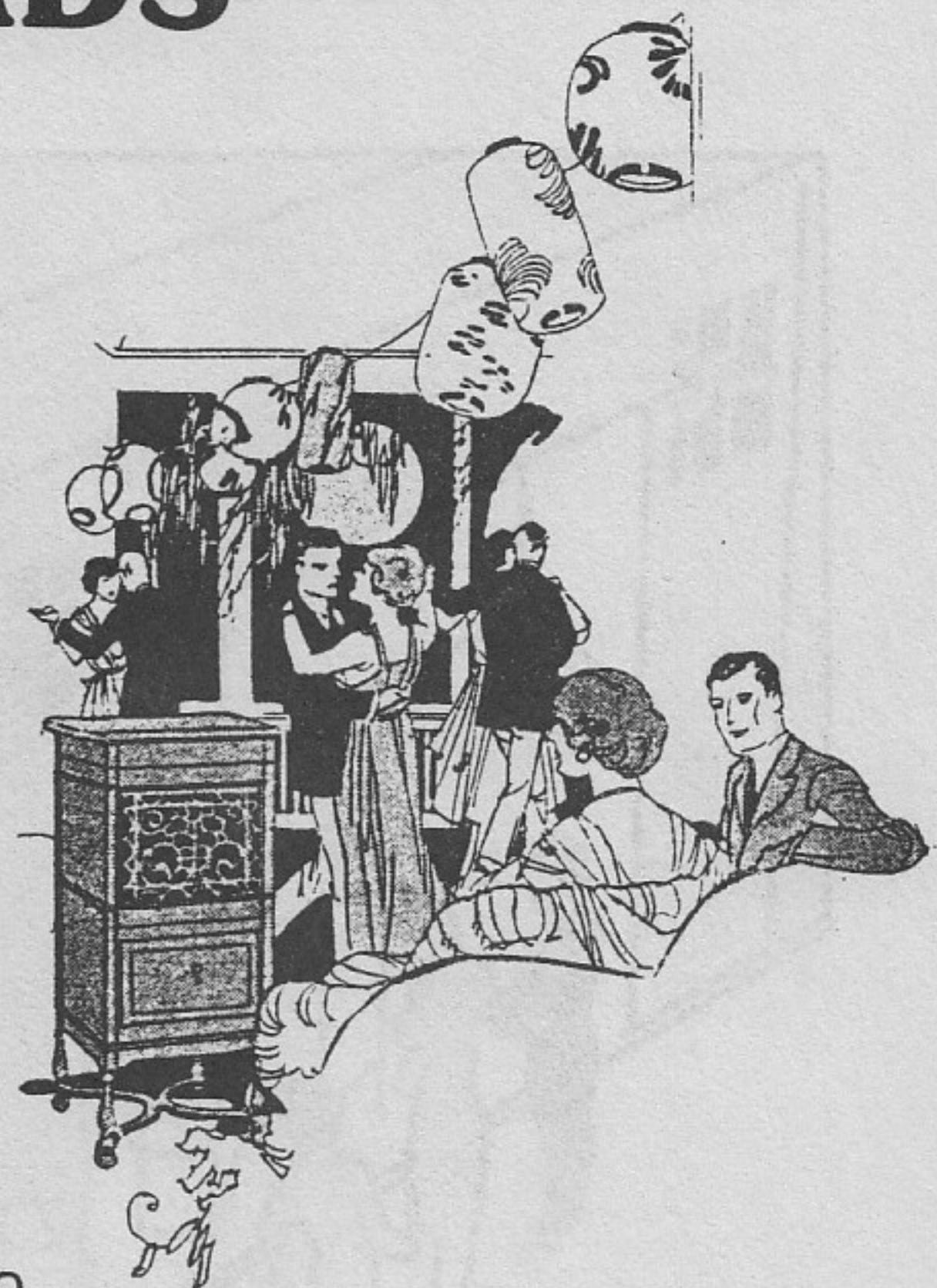
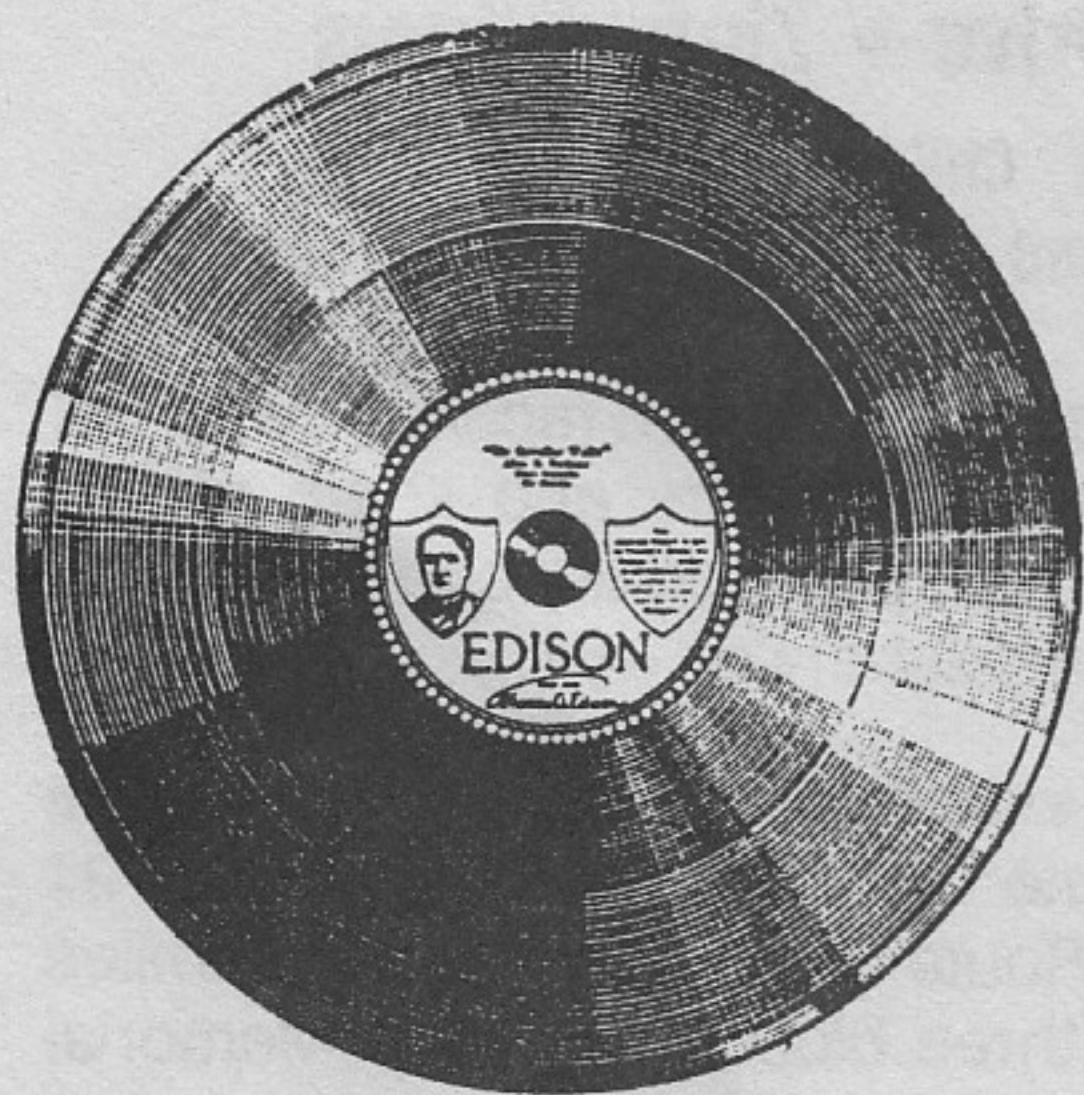
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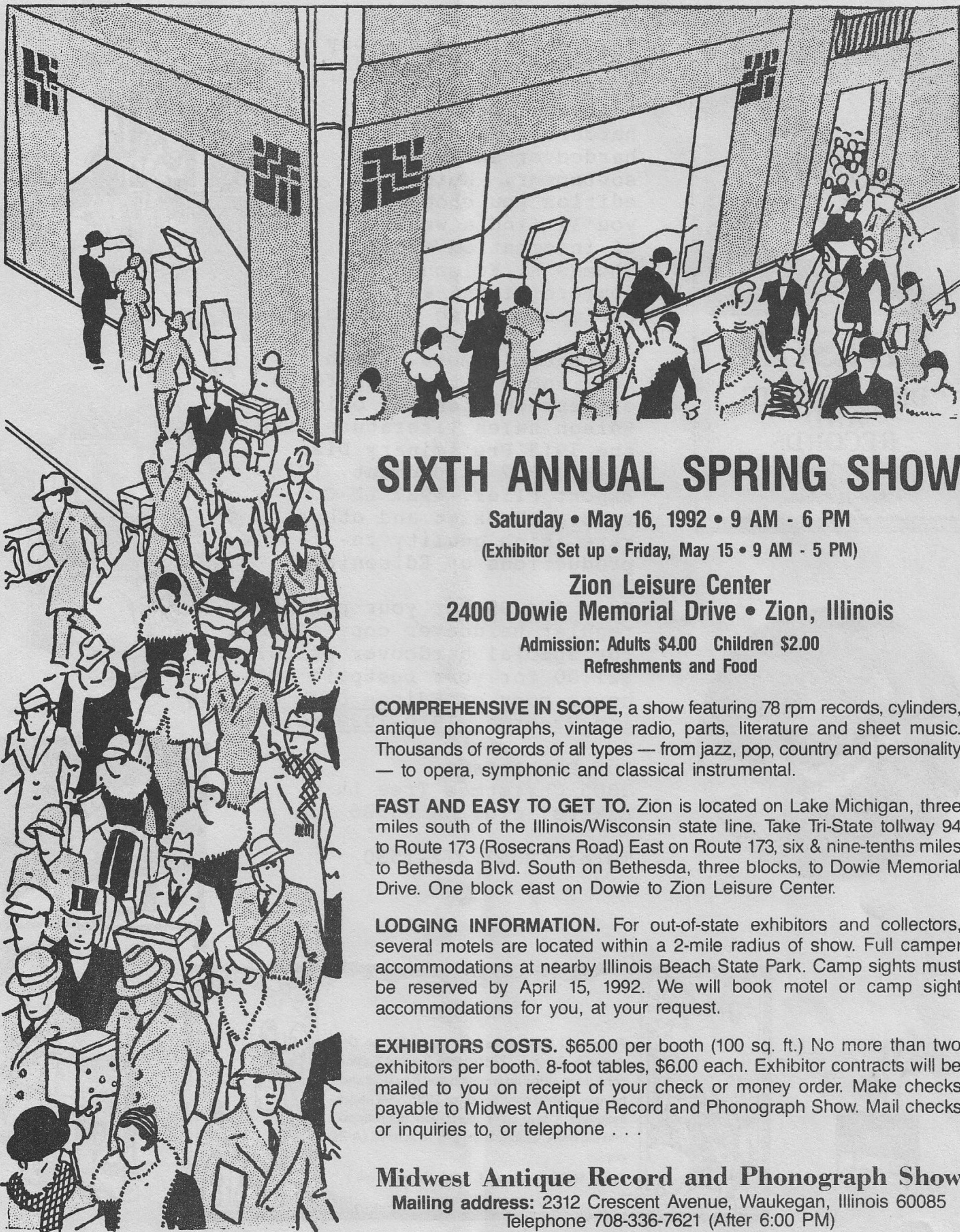
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A **special hardcover edition** of *Edison Disc Artists & Records, 1910-1929 Second Edition*, containing all the information that Ray Wile and I have published together since 1985. 294 pages, including a four-color illustration hand-tipped into the book. Strictly limited to 18 lettered (A-R) copies.

Price: \$65.00, postpaid. (Only 5 copies left.)



# Midwest Antique Record and Phonograph Show



## SIXTH ANNUAL SPRING SHOW

Saturday • May 16, 1992 • 9 AM - 6 PM

(Exhibitor Set up • Friday, May 15 • 9 AM - 5 PM)

**Zion Leisure Center  
2400 Dowie Memorial Drive • Zion, Illinois**

Admission: Adults \$4.00 Children \$2.00  
Refreshments and Food

**COMPREHENSIVE IN SCOPE**, a show featuring 78 rpm records, cylinders, antique phonographs, vintage radio, parts, literature and sheet music. Thousands of records of all types — from jazz, pop, country and personality — to opera, symphonic and classical instrumental.

**FAST AND EASY TO GET TO.** Zion is located on Lake Michigan, three miles south of the Illinois/Wisconsin state line. Take Tri-State tollway 94 to Route 173 (Rosecrans Road) East on Route 173, six & nine-tenths miles to Bethesda Blvd. South on Bethesda, three blocks, to Dowie Memorial Drive. One block east on Dowie to Zion Leisure Center.

**LODGING INFORMATION.** For out-of-state exhibitors and collectors, several motels are located within a 2-mile radius of show. Full camper accommodations at nearby Illinois Beach State Park. Camp sights must be reserved by April 15, 1992. We will book motel or camp sight accommodations for you, at your request.

**EXHIBITORS COSTS.** \$65.00 per booth (100 sq. ft.) No more than two exhibitors per booth. 8-foot tables, \$6.00 each. Exhibitor contracts will be mailed to you on receipt of your check or money order. Make checks payable to Midwest Antique Record and Phonograph Show. Mail checks or inquiries to, or telephone . . .

**Midwest Antique Record and Phonograph Show**  
Mailing address: 2312 Crescent Avenue, Waukegan, Illinois 60085  
Telephone 708-336-7621 (After 6:00 PM)